CLASSIC POP

eighties electronic eclectic

BUMPER 108-PAGE ISSUE

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XPROPAGANDA
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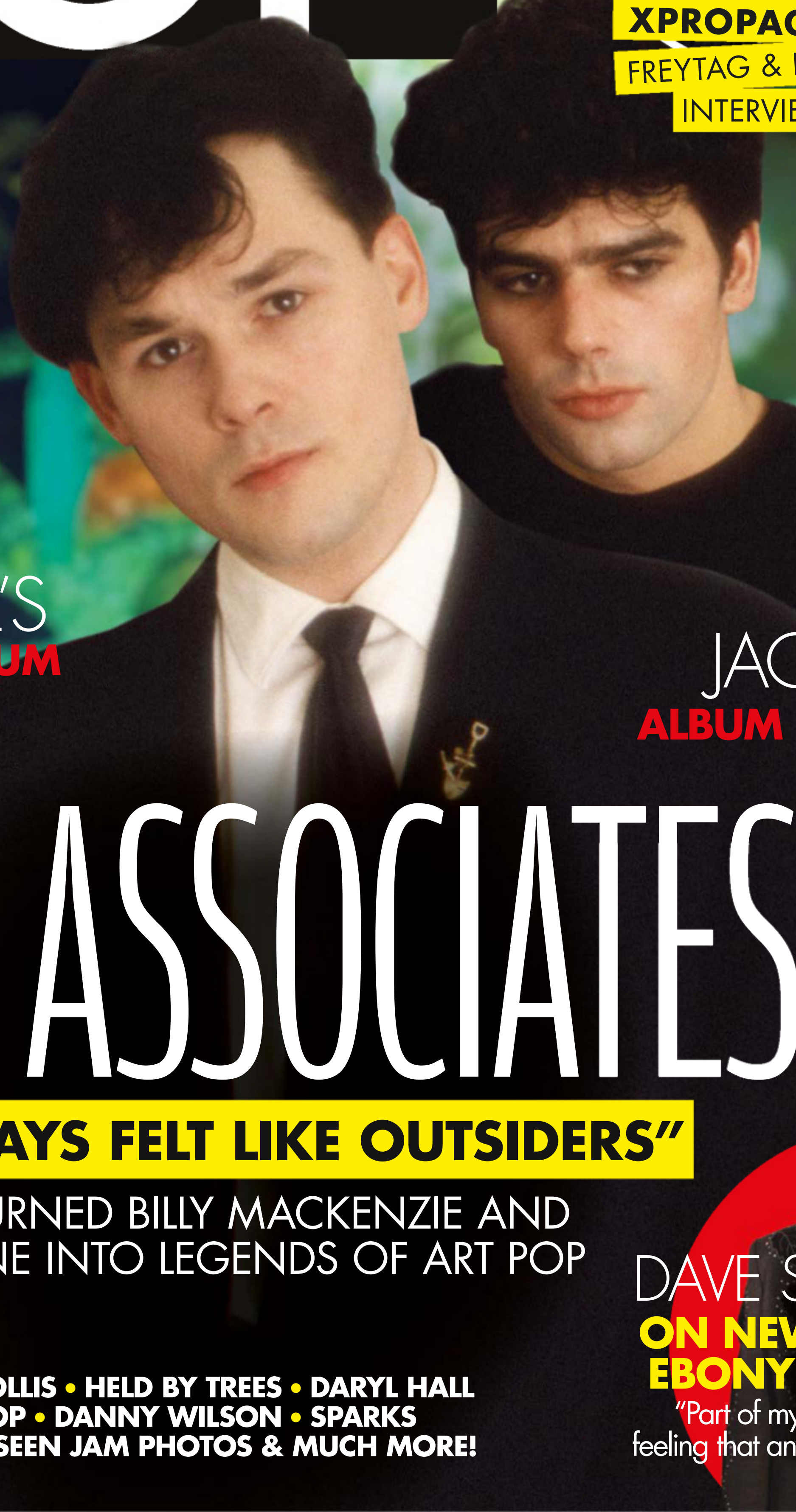
INTERVIEWED



2022 FESTIVAL GUIDE

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Classic Pop
May/June 2022
Issue 75
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JANET JACKSON
ALBUM BY ALBUM

THE ASSOCIATES

"WE ALWAYS FELT LIKE OUTSIDERS"

HOW SULK TURNED BILLY MACKENZIE AND ALAN RANKINE INTO LEGENDS OF ART POP

DAVE STEWART
ON NEW PROJECT EBONY McQUEEN
"Part of my personality is the feeling that anything is possible"

PLUS
MARK HOLLIS • HELD BY TREES • DARYL HALL
DREAMPOP • DANNY WILSON • SPARKS
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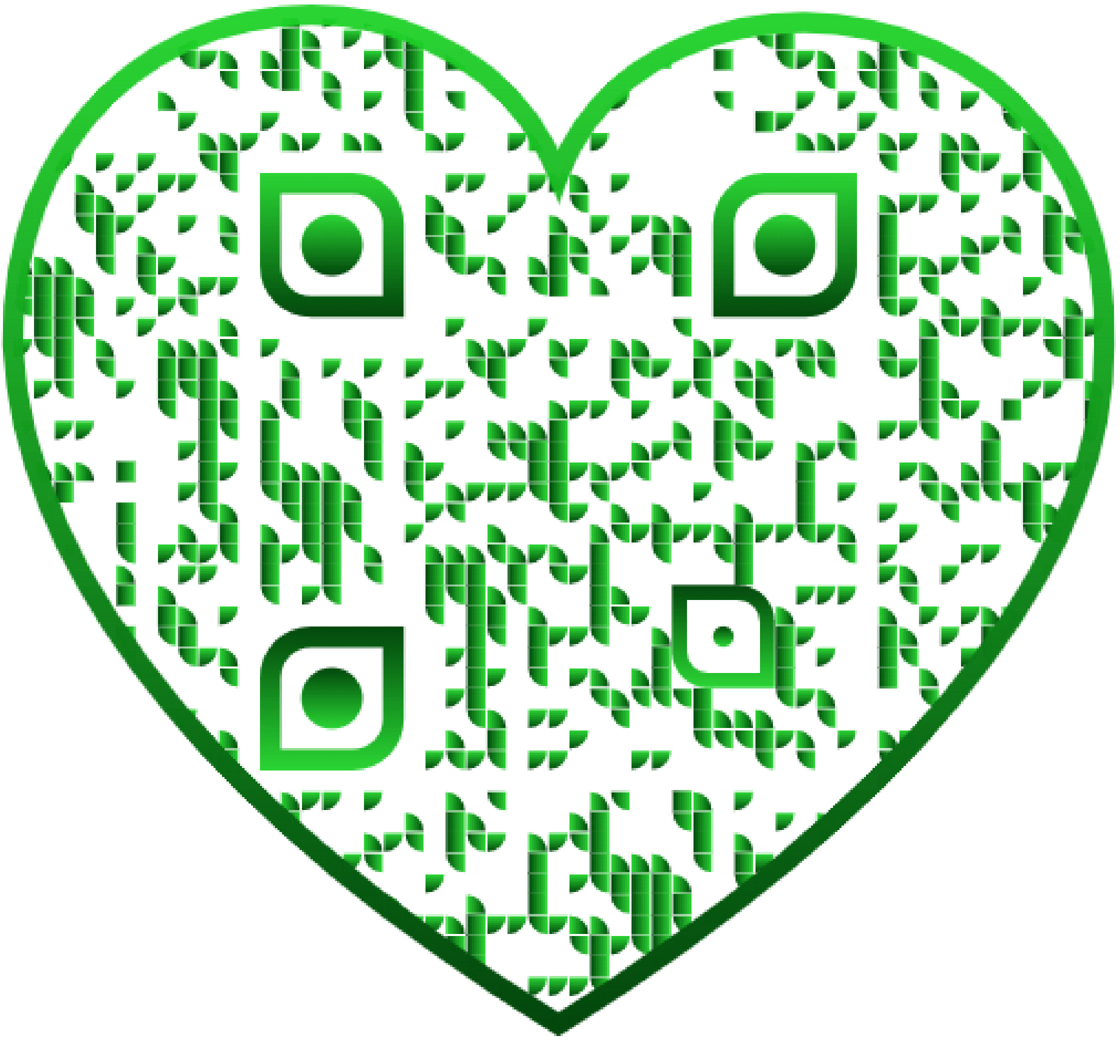

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CLASSIC POP

WELCOME

It's a much overused adjective, but I can't think of a better way to describe Billy Mackenzie than 'inimitable'. A bracingly unique vocalist, who else has fused the influences of Dusty Springfield, Billie Holiday and post-punk to come up with avant-garde pop?

In our expansive cover feature this issue we meet those who worked with Mackenzie down the years to tell the story of The Associates – both before and after they dropped the definite article – and in particular go behind the scenes of their game-changing *Sulk* album. We speak to Billy's right-hand man Alan Rankine, bandmate Michael Dempsey and producer Mike Hedges, the latter pithily summing up Mackenzie's forward-thinking brilliance: "Bill was fanatical about avoiding any well-trodden path."

For an album that made the UK Top 10 and crossed over to the mainstream, *Sulk* remains a singular piece of work, testament to the wonderful breadth of music that made the charts in 1982. It's a challenging listening experience in some regards, but hugely rewarding and utterly unforgettable.

While Mackenzie's vocals stand apart from any of his contemporaries, his band weren't alone in testing the boundaries of what could be achieved in the recording studio. Tying in with a new book and documentary about Mark Hollis, this issue we also get to grips with the truth behind the myths surrounding the enigmatic Talk Talk frontman. I'm a huge admirer of Hollis and the band, particularly their faultless final three studio LPs. Hollis' perfectionism is now the stuff of legend, driven by tales of Talk Talk sessions that pushed its musicians to the limit – and in some cases past it.

We now live in a very different musical landscape, though, and the days of lavish six- or seven-figure advances from record labels to lay down an album are mostly a thing of the past. Susanne Freytag and Claudia Brücken – no strangers to studio indulgence with Propaganda when they crafted their seminal *A Secret Wish* album – now return as xPropaganda with a stunning comeback record that finds them teaming up once again with producer Stephen Lipson. As they hilariously point out in our exclusive interview, a healthy chunk of the budget for new LP *The Heart Is Strange* went on sandwiches. However, thanks to the appliance of science, take a listen and it sounds equally as lush as the band's much-heralded 1985 debut.

Enjoy the issue!

Steve Harnell, Editor

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Steve

75

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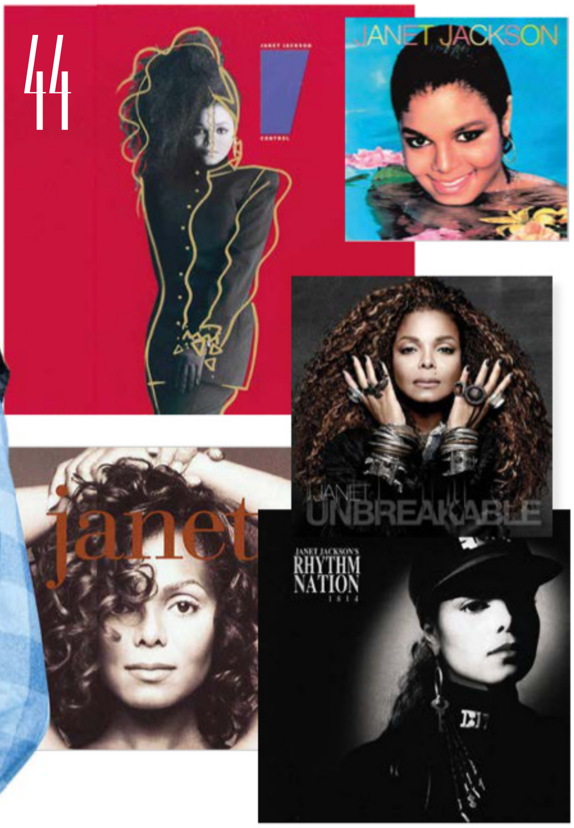
CLASSIC POP

CONTENTS

75

24

80



44

FEATURES

THE ASSOCIATES 24
Alan Rankine, Mike Hedges, Michael Dempsey and Martyn Ware remember the late Billy Mackenzie

CLASSIC ALBUM 32
We shine a spotlight on *Older,* George Michael's best-selling 1996 LP

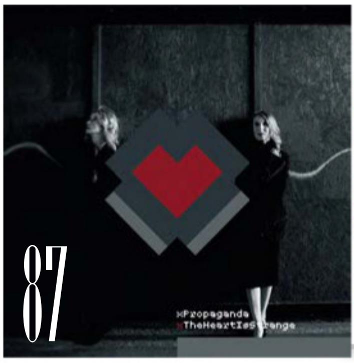
MARK HOLLIS 38
To mark the release of a new book and film about the Talk Talk frontman, we look at the life and career of this hugely influential musical figure

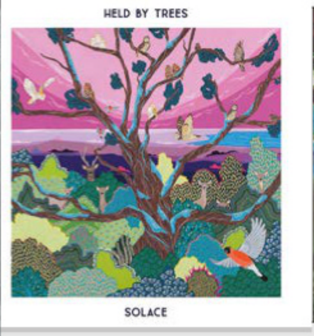
ALBUM BY ALBUM 44
Janet Jackson's long-playing work goes under the microscope

XPROPAGANDA 48
Susanne Freytag and Claudia Brücken reveal all about their new studio album, *The Heart Is Strange*

FESTIVAL GUIDE 54
Your at-a-glance guide to our pick of 2022's pop-friendly outdoor events

DAVE STEWART 60
The sometime Eurythmic tells *Classic Pop* about his new solo album, the autobiographical *Ebony McQueen*





FORGET ME NOTS 66
We give Danny Wilson's *Bebop Moptop* some much-needed love

Q+A EMF 68
Frontman James Atkin on the band's comeback album, *Go Go Sapiens*

TOP 20 80s-SAMPLING HITS 72
Our countdown of the 20 best hits that borrowed from the 1980s

DARYL HALL 80
The pop-soul legend speaks to *CP* about his new solo comp, *BeforeAfter*

NEWS

POP-UP 10
Boy George, George Michael, NKOTB, Pet Shop Boys, Soft Cell, Prince, The Jam and more

1-HIT WONDER 12
Bring It Down (This Insane Thing) by Redskins

Q+A HELD BY TREES 14
We meet David Joseph to hear about his Talk Talk-inspired new album

MY POP LIFE 16
Broadcaster Samira Ahmed reveals her love of Madonna

LOST & FOUND 18
Crowded House's eponymous debut LP

A TO Z OF POP 20
P is for Peel Sessions

REGULARS

THIS MONTH IN POP 22
The most memorable pop moments of May 1981

TOP 10: 10 MAY 1986 58
Falco, Janet Jackson, Level 42, Queen, Five Star and more

POPARAZZI 70
Your encounters with pop royalty

POPSCENE: DREAMPOP 76
An instant overview of this most painterly of pop sub-genres

SUPERFAN 78
George Michael fan Saf Sathi

CLASSIC POP MOMENT 106
Dire Straits release landmark album *Brothers In Arms*

REVIEWS

THE HOT LIST 86
Sun's Signature, ABBA, New Order, Teenage Fanclub, The Step

NEW ALBUMS 87
xPropaganda, Liam Gallagher, Dubstar, The Waterboys, Bruce Hornsby, UB40 Featuring Ali Campbell & Astro, Everything Everything, EMF, Wet Leg, John Illsley, Ann Wilson, Interlopers, Def Leppard, Blossoms, Colin Hay, Röyksopp, Kula Shaker, Belle And Sebastian, Wallis Bird, Held By Trees, Bloc Party, The Chameleons and more

REISSUES 94
The Associates/Billy Mackenzie, Rick Astley, Sparks, Go West, The Police, NOW compilations, Kraftwerk, Daryl Hall & John Oates, Madness, Toyah, Marc Almond, Girls At Our Best!, Foreigner, XTC and more

LIVE 103
Susanne Vega, Echo & The Bunnymen

BOOKS 105
Baptism Of Fire by Ian Little; *Here They Come With Their Make-Up On: Suede, Coming Up… And More Adventures Beyond The Wild Frontiers* by Jane Savidge; *My Life In Pictures* by Tony Hadley; *David Bowie: All The Songs – The Story Behind Every Track* by Benoît Clerc

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CLASSIC POP WHO'S WHO

75

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WHO IS POP'S MOST UNDERRATED GENIUS?

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SOUNDBITES

*1 "He'd baulk at the words 'pop' and 'genius' but his exploratory late work with Talk Talk and solo album is off-the-scale inspirational."
*2 "One of the great chroniclers of Englishness, Partridge's quiet, un-showy manner has meant he's often overlooked when we think of the greats of the 80s."
*3 "He's respected, sure, but it's not recognised enough that he's created magic with four bands and still is going strong 40 years later."
*4 "Green's continually constructed and deconstructed pop music like few others."
*5 "He's got the multi-instrumentalist skills of Prince, the voice of an angel and songwriting smarts to boot. The only thing missing is hits."
*6 "For his Street Sounds and Electro comps, discovering *Rapper's Delight*, releasing Imagination's first singles and being an unsung hero of dance music in general."
*7 "Would that more pop stars were this emotionally articulate."

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OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Writing for *Classic Pop* since our first issue, **John Earls** has been to Adam Ant's house, had a selfie with Neil Tennant taken by Chris Lowe and been serenaded to *Last Christmas* by Shirlie Kemp. This issue, he helms our reissues reviews section, meets xPropaganda and attempts to keep up with Dave Stewart's mile-a-minute mind.

Matthew Lindsay has written for *The Quietus* and *mojo4music.com*. He is also the co-author of Tom Watkins' *Let's Make Lots Of Money*, long-listed for the Penderyn Music Book Prize. A regular contributor to *Classic Pop Presents*, for the regular magazine Matthew meets members of The Associates as well as various band collaborators for this issue's in-depth cover feature.

Wyndham Wallace has written for *Uncut*, *The Guardian* and *The Quietus*. His documentary on Travis, *Almost Fashionable*, is on Sky Arts and his book, *Lee, Myself & I*, is in shops. For *Classic Pop*, Wyndham oversees our new albums reviews section. This issue, he also examines the various myths surrounding Talk Talk's enigmatic Mark Hollis.

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the single
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with
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"A band looking as much to its future as its past." – Clash
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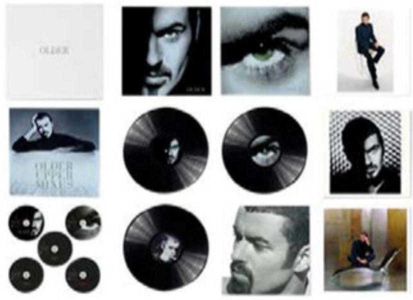
POP UP

Soft Cell and PSB unite for synth-pop supergroup

Soft Cell and Pet Shop Boys have joined forces for *Purple Zone*, a taster single from the former's forthcoming studio album **Happiness Not Included*. Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe originally wanted to remix the track after witnessing Soft Cell perform it on their tour last year, but ended up creating a memorable duet instead. Marc Almond, who pops up in an ice cream van for the song's video, commented: "Working with the Pet Shop Boys was a pleasure, and this track is the perfect combination of us and them."

The CD single also features Soft Cell's take on the X-Ray Spex classic *The Day The World Turned Day-Glo* as well as the Manhattan Clique remix of *Purple Zone*, while its 12" boasts a full selection of mixes by Pet Shop Boys.



Long-awaited deluxe boxset for Older unveiled

Newly remastered from the original tapes, George Michael's best-selling *Older* album from 1996 is finally getting a much-anticipated deluxe edition treatment.

The 5CD boxset version features the original studio album plus six-track mini LP *Upper* as well as three discs of remixes.

Also included is a 12" 48-page book, *The Story of Older*, featuring a new essay by Dan Davies recounting the stories behind the album with contributions from key people who helped make the record, plus rare and previously unseen photos. The boxset also boasts a set of three 12" art prints of George.

Older will also be available on 180g vinyl as a 2LP set of the original album and single disc version of *Upper*.

● **Read our Classic Album feature on *Older* on page 32**

NKOTB TIP THEIR HATS TO THE 80s

New Kids On The Block are revisiting the 80s for their latest project. New single *Bring Back The Time* has a retro feel and also boasts a video with a host of visual nods to their favourite promos from Robert Palmer, Talking Heads and Duran Duran to Madonna and A Flock Of Seagulls.

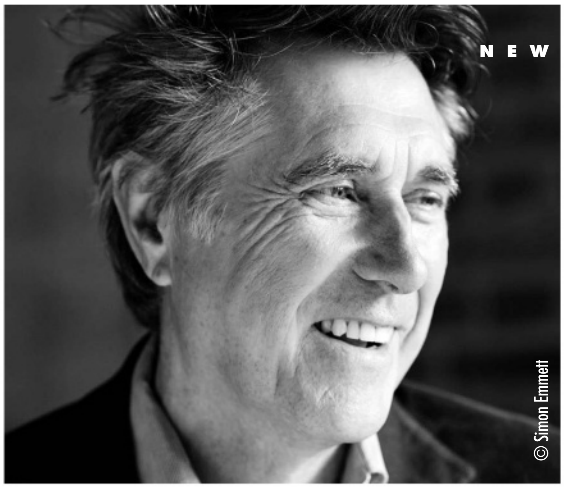
Donnie Wahlberg explained: "From the second that I started working on this song, I knew it could be a perfect anthem for the entire Mixtape 2022 tour. Sort of like a 'mixtape within a mixtape'".

The US New Kids Mixtape Tour features En Vogue, Salt-N-Pepa plus Rick Astley who all feature in *Bring Back The Time*'s video with the latter paying

© Austin Hargrave

tribute to Talking Heads' David Byrne (pictured). Donnie added: "When the other artists from the tour lineup responded with such enthusiasm, and were willing to take this nostalgic musical journey together, I knew it would be something special for all of our fans. Hopefully, the song captures a love of music, of making memories and of people celebrating the best of times. We plan on bringing that very energy to the stage every single night."

As yet, no UK tour dates are planned but the band hope to remedy that in the near future as well as release new music.



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FERRY RETURNS WITH COVERS EP AND ROXY MUSIC REUNION TOUR

Roxy Music have confirmed details of their first tour in 11 years to mark the 50th anniversary of their debut album. Bryan Ferry, Phil Manzanera, Andy Mackay and Paul Thompson kick off with a string of US and Canadian dates in September before returning to the UK in October for gigs in Glasgow, Manchester and London.

Meanwhile, Ferry has interpreted some of his favourite love songs for a new solo project. *Love Letters* is a four-track digital EP including the Ketty Lester standard which provides its title. "I like extending my repertoire by covering songs from different genres and different times," explains Ferry. "It can be an interesting challenge, finding the best way to interpret them in my own style – whatever that may be."

Other tracks include the Bacharach/David classic *I Just Don't Know What To Do With Myself*, the Elvin Bishop-penned *Fooled Around And Fell In Love* and *The Very Thought Of You*, which, in Ferry's words, "is one of my all-time favourites... coming from that great period of songwriting." *Love Letters* marks Ferry's first new recordings in four years.

Ali Campbell's 'poignant' farewell album with much-missed Astro

Ali Campbell says his new studio album is all the more poignant following the death of bandmate Astro. *Unprecedented* by UB40 Featuring Ali Campbell & Astro, is released on 17 June and was recorded before Astro passed away last November. "Astro's death came as such a shock, I'm still reeling from it," explains Ali. "This album is now more poignant and special than either of us could have imagined when we were recording it. This is a way of keeping his memory alive."

Astro tackles a cover of The Kingstonians' reggae standard *Sufferer* on the record but more surprising is a version of *Stay Another Day* by East 17. "I love the melody," adds Campbell. "In the original UB40, we were good at choosing old reggae favourites because we grew up on songs like that but it's also interesting to take a totally unexpected track and cover it in a reggae style."

CLARIFICATION

On page 11 of Issue 73 of *Classic Pop* in our news story relating to the death of Astro we included a quote from a 2016 interview about the derivation of his nickname. We would like to clarify this came from an interview with Kevin Cooper of the UK Music Reviews website. Read the interview in full at: **www.ukmusicreviews.co.uk/interviews/interview-terence-wilson-astro/**

1 HIT WONDER

BRING IT DOWN (THIS INSANE THING)
REDSKINS

The Redskins formed out of York punk act No Swastikas and added a soulful element to anarchic alt-rock, throwing a prominent brass section into their only Top 40 hit.

Bring It Down (This Insane Thing) is a slick piece of guitar pop, aided by a mountainous drum track from The Style Council's Steve White and a resonant vocal from ex-*NME* writer Chris Dean. The brass was provided by a quartet consisting of three trumpeters and a saxophonist who contributed to much of the band's work. The track is also notable for the "hate the rich, delete unfairness, detest inequality" quote at the outset, and a long, DJ-fooling gap 90 seconds before the end.

The band were Marxist skinheads which irritated the more extreme skin movement from opposite political wings to the extent of being attacked onstage, while also experiencing tension with the more moderate left-wing sectors in pop – as regular sellers of the *Socialist Worker* and attendees of protest marches, they were critical of the Red Wedge movement for not acting on their lyrical messages.

Bring It Down (This Insane Thing) reached No.33 in 1985. The band released one studio album, *Neither Washington Nor Moscow*, then split in 1986. They've never reformed, and the album was finally reissued, with a host of extras, earlier this year.

Matthew Rudd is the host of Forgotten 80s on Absolute 80s

POP UP

CLASSIC PRINCE LIVE SHOW MAKES IT OUT OF THE VAULT

© Nancy Bundt

Prince's estate has delved into his personal archive once more to release one of the late star's most celebrated live shows that's remained under lock and key for almost three decades. Beamed to millions live via satellite and captured for posterity in the Grammy Award-nominated concert film *Prince And The Revolution: Live*, the show at Syracuse's Carrier Dome on 30 March 1985 was part of his Purple Rain Tour.

The show's audio is remastered from the original two-inch multitrack master reels while the film footage has been digitally enhanced onto Blu-ray with selectable stereo, 5.1 surround and Dolby Atmos sound.

Available on 3 June, the new release marks the first time that the concert has been made available on vinyl and CD. *Prince And The Revolution: Live* will also be the first release by the late star to be made available to supporting digital streaming platforms in spatial audio, with a new Dolby Atmos being created especially for the project.

"Listening back to that Syracuse show, I'm like, wow, we sound like a freight train just coming out of nowhere," reflects The Revolution's BrownMark. "That was powerful. I've been to a lot of concerts, and never seen anything like that."

A limited run Collector's Edition of the acclaimed performance will be available exclusively from the Official Prince Store. Housed in a luxury foil box, the set includes the remixed and remastered audio pressed onto three coloured LPs (purple, red and gold vinyl), 2 CDs, the Blu-ray disc, a comprehensive 44-page book complete with never-before-seen photos of the Purple Rain Tour, new liner notes highlighting stories and memories from all five members of The Revolution as well as a limited edition poster.

Electric Ladies tour is rescheduled for June

Following Hazel O'Connor's recent serious health issues, the Electric Ladies tour which she was due to have been a part of has been rescheduled with a new line-up of performers.

Leading the way will be Toyah, fresh from the recent success of her *Posh Pop* studio album and *Sunday Lunch* Youtube series for a 15-date UK tour that begins on 1 June at the Buxton Opera House and ends on 24 June at Birmingham Town Hall. The tour includes shows in Manchester, Guildford, London and Swindon. Joining Toyah on the tour will be new wave singer-songwriter Lene Lovich and Republica frontwoman Saffron. A portion of the proceeds from each show will be donated to help with O'Connor's ongoing recovery.

For more details, visit rlnmusic.com/ or seetickets.com

PAUL YOUNG
T'PAU HUE & CRY

ESSENTIAL 80s

SEPT 2022		OCT 2022			
Fri 23	**STOCKTON** Globe	Sat 01	**STEVENAGE** Concert Hall	Tue 11	**BIRMINGHAM** Symphony Hall
Sat 24	**EDINBURGH** Usher Hall	Sun 02	**PETERBOROUGH** New Theatre	Wed 12	**FOLKESTONE** Leas Cliff Hall
Sun 25	**HALIFAX** Victoria Theatre	Tue 04	**BURY** St Edmunds Apex	Fri 14	**SHEFFIELD** City Hall
Tue 27	**NORTHAMPTON** Derngate	Wed 05	**BOURNEMOUTH** Pavilion Theatre	Sat 15	**HULL** City Hall
Wed 28	**CARDIFF** St David's Hall	Fri 07	**PORTSMOUTH** Guildhall	Sun 16	**HIGH WYCOMBE** The Swan
Fri 30	**WEYMOUTH** Pavilion Theatre	Sat 08	**TORQUAY** Princess Theatre	Tue 18	**STOKE** Victoria Theatre
		Mon 10	**WOKING** New Victoria Theatre	Wed 19	**MANCHESTER** Bridgewater Hall
				Thu 20	**LONDON** Indigo at the O2

MARILLION

SEPTEMBER 2022

SUN 18	BLACKBURN	KING GEORGE'S HALL
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WED 21	YORK	BARBICAN
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SAT 24	AYLESBURY	FRIARS WATERSIDE
SUN 25	STOKE	VICTORIA HALL
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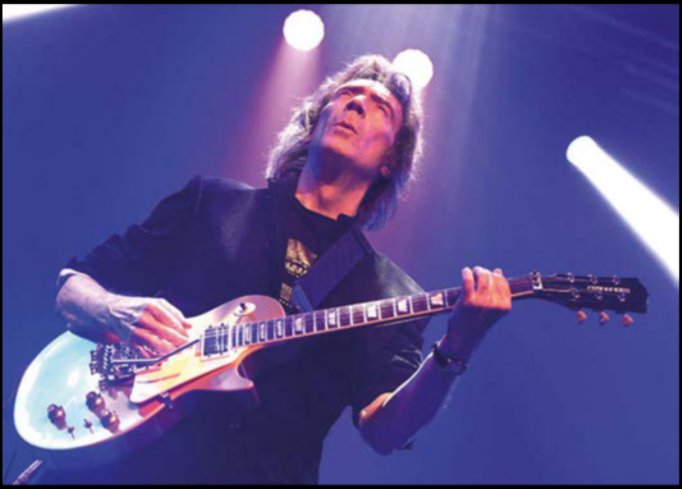

FOXTROT at FIFTY
+ HACKETT HIGHLIGHTS

SEPTEMBER 2022

09 SWANSEA ARENA
10 CARDIFF ST DAVID'S HALL
11 CAMBRIDGE CORN EXCHANGE
13 AYLESBURY FRIARS WATERSIDE
14 TORQUAY PRINCESS THEATRE
16 PORTSMOUTH GUILDHALL
17 BEXHILL DE LA WARR PAVILION
18 BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY HALL
20 HULL CITY HALL
22 GATESHEAD SAGE
23 GLASGOW ROYAL CONCERT HALL
24 YORK BARBICAN
26 BUXTON OPERA HOUSE
27 GRIMSBY AUDITORIUM
28 NORTHAMPTON ROYAL & DERNGATE
30 SHEFFIELD CITY HALL

OCTOBER 2022

01 MANCHESTER O_2 APOLLO
03 SOUTHEND CLIFFS PAVILION
04 IPSWICH REGENT THEATRE
05 BATH FORUM
07 LEICESTER DE MONTFORT HALL
08 LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC
09 BRIGHTON CENTRE
11 BOURNEMOUTH PAVILION
12 LONDON EVENTIM APOLLO HAMMERSMITH

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Held By Trees is the brainchild of David Joseph and features a host of musicians who played on Talk Talk's final albums

Q+A

HELD BY TREES

DAVID JOSEPH'S INSTRUMENTAL PROJECT SEES TALK TALK ALUMNI JOINING FORCES FOR A REMARKABLE ALBUM THAT IMMERSES ITSELF IN THE AURA OF THE BAND'S SPIRIT OF EDEN AND LAUGHING STOCK ERAS

STEVE HARNELL

Instrumental project Held By Trees is the stuff of dreams for fans of Talk Talk and Mark Hollis. Helmed by multi-instrumentalist and composer David Joseph, their new studio album *Solace* dips into late-period Talk Talk and Hollis' solo LP for inspiration using many of the same musicians that played on those sessions. Guitarist Robbie McIntosh, percussionist Martin Ditcham, pianist Laurence Pendrous and flautist Andy Panayi are all onboard, while the record is mixed by Talk Talk collaborator Phill Brown.

Furthermore, the eight-track LP includes a latter-era Pink Floyd ambience in places with the band's live guitarist Tim Renwick also contributing to *Solace*. Bolstering the ranks, too, are Dire Straits founder member David Knopfler, Blur/Damon Albarn sideman Mike Smith and blues great Eric Bibb.

If, like many of us, you've looked at Talk Talk's slim yet stunning discography and yearned for more, this new album is a mouth-watering prospect. And as Storm Eunice battered CP Towers, the irony of discussing a record that celebrates the calming power of nature with David isn't lost on us.

How did the initial Held By Tree project come together? Was there a specific jumping off point for it?

It was a couple of days in the first lockdown – a glorious Spring, an unprecedented quiet in the world, the aroma of blossom and cut grass was on the breeze. It was like nothing any of us have ever known before. Traffic was off the roads, people could only travel a certain distance from their homes. The world felt like it was breathing in a new way. I found myself noodling on my home set-up and realised I was leaning into my great reverence for *Spirit Of Eden*, *Laughing Stock* and Mark Hollis' solo record. That minimal spacious sound. I came up with three pieces of music then sent them to Tim Renwick. He introduced me to Phill Brown who engineered and mixed the late Talk Talk albums and Phill was really encouraging. In turn, Phill intro'd me to Martin Ditcham who played percussion on those records. That started a train of thought – what would happen if I got together some of the musicians that worked on the *Spirit Of Eden* and *Laughing Stock* sessions? I knew they had a long parade of musicians coming in and improvising on compositions. I thought they could then do a similar thing with my drum patterns and chord progressions.

That then prompted you to look further afield for collaborators...

I found Laurence Pendrous on Facebook who played piano and harmonium on Mark Hollis' solo record. Andy Panayi also came from Facebook who played flute and clarinet on Mark's album. Before long, I had a nucleus of people who'd worked with Hollis and/or Talk Talk. Then we got Robbie McIntosh, who uses the same studio in Dorset as me – Room With a View – in on the sessions. We started to replace my demos with real parts allowing places for more improvisation. This was all going on during various stages of lockdown so a lot of these guys recorded their parts in their own home studios. The cast has ended up including David Knopfler, Eric Bibb – who's a massive hero of mine – as well as Mike Smith who is Damon

Albarn's musical director and plays saxophone on our album.

This must be the first time that this set of musicians have been back together working on the same project surely?
It is. Someone I guess was always going to think of this, though. It just happens to have been me. Time waits for no man and many of the collaborators on those Talk Talk records are no longer with us. People like Henry Lowther on trumpet. We're 30 years on from the last Talk Talk album and 25 years on from the only Hollis record. That's a lot of silence. There's a lot of Pink Floyd influence on this album, too, and the instrumental supergroup Sky. And there will always be a lot of influence of whatever Damon Albarn and Graham Coxon are up to. Blur are my favourite band. There's a parallel with what Damon is doing in his solo work these days in improvisation and being inspired by the landscape.

What about live plans? There's footage online of you rehearsing...
We're exploring that very seriously for late 2022 or sometime in 2023. Everyone in the band is pretty busy. We have Robbie McIntosh and Paul Beavis who is Andy Fairweather Low's drummer. Andy Panayi is an in-demand session musician and accomplished jazz soloist who also lectures at the Royal College Of Music.

Fittingly, there's an ecological element to the new album...
We're partnering with the Play It Green organisation. We'll be able to plant a real tree in a sustainable managed forest in Madagascar for every album that we sell, which takes care of our carbon footprint. It actually takes out more carbon from the atmosphere than we put in via manufacturing the record. We're not the first to do this, I think Pink Floyd planted forests with the proceeds from their *Echoes* compilation about 20 years ago. But to know we're doing this with a clear, green conscience while celebrating the natural world with our music feels right. We're using as little plastic as possible in the manufacturing process, recycled eco mix vinyl and recycled card with the CDs. Without being preachy, annoying and woke, we're trying to do the right thing regarding climate change.

The power of nature is intrinsic to the statement you're making isn't it?
The album is called *Solace* for a reason – the music was solace to make for me during lockdown and I hope it translates for the listener that they find a sense of comfort and peace listening to it. Trees are a divine symbol of solace because they quietly get on with giving us air, removing carbon and serving this planet. When we walk among them we're in the company of a lifegiving force. Nature looms large in the album as I've included field recordings I made in the South West over the course of several months. There's a real thunderstorm from a field in Wiltshire, the sound of the waves from Bournemouth beach at night and birdsong from a wooded valley in North Somerset. That's woven into the music and there's something about the sound of the natural world which does something to the human soul that's quite powerful. There's nothing like the dawn chorus or the sound of a blackbird singing as dusk comes on.

There's an incredible bravery to Mark Hollis' songwriting, the way he gradually stripped it back was almost unprecedented as a major artist...
It was a withdrawal and a deliberate direction that ends with years and years of silence. Not just in terms of his musical output but in terms of his press. Now, of course, he's passed on so that silence is permanent. That journey is almost a perfect narrative. With the Hollis solo LP, there's a kind of intimacy and vulnerability that's incredibly disarming and almost painful in its paucity because there's so much space and weight on every note. I'm almost emotional thinking about how the solo album ends. How the silence that follows was so intentional. As I understand it from talking to people who knew Mark, there was never any intention of making a follow-up. He'd said everything he wanted to say. He worked a little bit with UNKLE but remained uncredited as he got his name taken off the album. Mark also produced a couple of tracks on Anja Garbarek's album *Smiling & Waving* in 2001. Then there was this weird 30-second piece for the TV show *Boss*...

Pianist Laurence Pendrous played on Mark Hollis' eponymous debut album

Martin Ditcham worked extensively with Talk Talk and co-wrote Sade's *The Sweetest Taboo*

"WITH THE HOLLIS SOLO LP, THERE'S A KIND OF INTIMACY AND VULNERABILITY THAT'S INCREDIBLY DISARMING AND ALMOST PAINFUL IN ITS PAUCITY BECAUSE THERE'S SO MUCH SPACE AND WEIGHT ON EVERY NOTE"

It's a pretty nondescript piece of music isn't it, that soundtrack piece...
It's incidental sound really. If Mark had done anything you'd think it would be along the lines of avant-garde minimalists like Morton Feldman, Steve Reich or John Cage. Deliberately obtuse and difficult. He did a solo piece for an art installation that's called *Piano*, which is out there and was around the same time as the solo album. There's no singing on it, it's just piano. The first song on our album is called *Next To Silence*. If you imagine an ocean of nothing in terms of where the Talk Talk/Hollis thing got to, to even tread on the edges of that holy ground I thought that we had to emerge from the silence. I'm at pains to say that I don't think I'm Mark Hollis and we're not Talk Talk but if we are going to have so many people involved in this project as worked with them, then uttermost care and reverence needs to be applied because of how much that music means to so many people. It only increases as time goes by as more and more generations discover *Spirit Of Eden* onwards. I know that I have to tread incredibly respectfully. ■

● ***Solace* is out now via Tweed Jacket Music and reviewed on page 93**

Samira Ahmed

MY POP LIFE

THE JOURNALIST AND BROADCASTER TALKS US THROUGH HER MUSIC OBSESSIONS

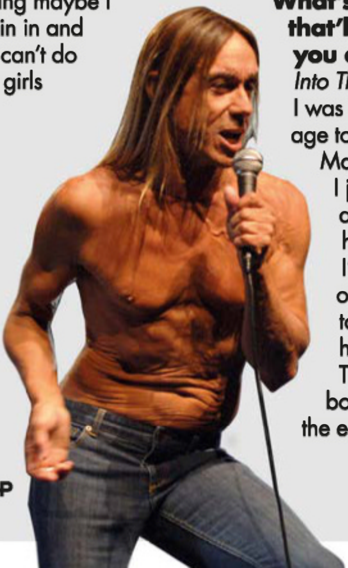
STEVE O'BRIEN

What's the first song you remember loving?
I think it was probably *Northern Lights* by Renaissance, but my mother would probably say it was *January* by Pilot, which I used to sing a lot.

What's your all-time favourite album?
I have two choices here. My pure favourite is definitely *A Hard Day's Night* by The Beatles, but the album that I remember going out and buying and cherishing was *Parallel Lines* by Blondie. Later on, when I got my job on *Newsnight* as a reporter, I remember saving up a month's salary to buy myself a proper stereo, and I bought *Nonsuch* by XTC. I just love that record.

What was the first gig you ever went to?
Oh, it was awful. I went with a school friend to see Kajagoogoo at the Hammersmith Odeon in the mid-80s. I mean, I knew one or two singles and they were fine, but I just didn't care. We were in the second row and everyone was screaming and I remember thinking maybe I should try and join in and then going, no, I can't do this. All the other girls were a bit scary and fanatical.

Okay, what's the *best* gig you've ever been to?
I think it might be Iggy & The Stooges when they were part of Meltdown in 2007. When I interviewed Paul McCartney at the Royal Festival Hall, he asked me, "What gigs have you seen here?", and I said Iggy Pop, and he was really interested in what Iggy at the Royal Festival Hall would have been like as a show. Iggy was older then but it was a proper full-on thing. He doesn't lacerate himself anymore, but he got a big crowd of people up on stage, bouncing away. A lot of them were in suits, but they really threw themselves into it.



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What's the song that'll always get you dancing?
Into The Groove. I was totally the right age to fall under Madonna's spell. I just have huge admiration for her and I think I'm slightly obsessed. I used to dream about her actually. There was a book written in the early 90s, called

I Dream Of Madonna, because of the number of women who used to dream about her. Not in a lesbian way, it was like she's your best friend or sister. So yeah, she's really important to me. I love her so much.

You've interviewed a lot of 80s musicians, from Duran Duran to Tears For Fears. Who haven't you interviewed that you'd love to?
Adam Ant – and I have tried! My former editor on [Radio Four arts programme] *Front Row*, Philip Sellars, has been following Adam Ant since the late 70s, and so we approached him, or his company, to try to get him on. I saw Adam when he did the *Dirk Wears White Sox* album live and remain obsessed by both his artistry and his gentle and very feminine sexuality, which is why I think women adore him. He's normally interviewed so badly. I've seen him sitting on the sofa on breakfast TV and they don't get him at all. I think they, dare I say this, slightly laugh at him.

What music magazines did you buy?
Smash Hits. I was working as a reporter on *Channel 4 News* in the mid-2000s when it folded and they covered the story.

I said, look, I know what this magazine did and it was singles not albums, it was singing along not analysing the lyrics. I really enjoyed the writing and the wit of *Smash Hits* even if I didn't always like the music.

By the time I went to university in '86 I hated most of what was in the charts and switched over to Radio Four because I couldn't stand what was on Radio One. Then I started to buy the inkies when Britpop started up. I was in my twenties and it was such an exciting time. I remember listening to *Babies* by Pulp on the radio and thinking, this is one of the most incredible things I've ever heard in my life, you know, that pop music could still do that to you. So in the 90s I really started buying the inkies and magazines like *Select* and *Q*.

Of your Spotify end of year report, what was your most played song?
Venus by Bananarama! It was on my aerobics workout playlist that I was doing throughout lockdown. ■

● Samira Ahmed presents *Newswatch* on the BBC News channel and her podcast, *How I Found My Voice*, is available on all podcast platforms

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WED 02 NOVEMBER	HARROGATE CONVENTION CENTRE
FRI 04 NOVEMBER	SHEFFIELD CITY HALL
SAT 05 NOVEMBER	MANCHESTER 02 APOLLO
MON 07 NOVEMBER	LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC HALL
EXTRA DATE ADDED	
TUE 08 NOVEMBER	LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC HALL
WED 09 NOVEMBER	EDINBURGH USHER HALL
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CROWDED HOUSE
CROWDED HOUSE

Don't Dream It's Over, a magnificent, sardonic flag-waver with its dreamy middle eight, is deservedly Crowded House's most successful song, reaching No.2 in the US, yet any of the tracks from the delicious, polished self-titled debut album could have earned that accolade.

Formed in 1985 as Neil Finn stepped out from under the Split Enz shadow of big brother Tim, the band were accepted in the States before their own Australasian homeland. Four more singles – *Now We're Getting Somewhere*, *Mean To Me*, *World Where You Live* and the John Lennon-influenced *Something So Strong* – all combine majestic melodies with lyrical raised eyebrows, subtle electronic interludes and strong, concentrated musicianship.

The harmonies throughout, especially on *Tombstone*, are immaculate, and Finn's vocal range is enjoyably broad – *Can't Carry On* has him performing like a bouncy pop kid, on *That's What I Call Love* he responds to the co-vocals like a cabaret artist, in *Hole In The River* he's controlled and humane while *Love You 'Til The Day I Die* is an impassioned, rockier effort that stretches his vocals to the limit. The band's take on the Split Enz song *I Walk Away*, a late addition, still feels like an unnecessary imposter, though.

The album went to No.1 in Australia and No.12 in the United States. The UK eventually warmed to the band with 1991's *Woodface*, which yielded four Top 30 hit singles.

Matthew Rudd

POP UP

JAM PHOTOBOOK GETS 40TH ANNIVERSARY UPDATE

Derek D'Souza's Jam photobook *In The Crowd* – which has been out of print for almost a decade – has been updated with unseen shots for its anniversary edition.

After submitting photos of The Jam on their short summer tour of 1981 to the band's fanclub, D'Souza was invited by Paul Weller's parents Ann and John to shoot the trio formally. Derek eventually caught up with the band on 24 August 1981 at George Martin's AIR Studios as The Jam worked in Studio 1. D'Souza explains: "Paul already had the location in mind for the photo session – Chiswick House – with the band wearing dark suits to contrast with the natural backgrounds. It was my first photo session – for Britain's favourite band (and mine). The weather was good and despite my novice status, I was excited and raring to go. The band certainly seemed relaxed, and while they were used to having their pictures taken, this was probably different from most of their sessions."

● **The 40th anniversary edition of *In The Crowd* by Derek D'Souza is out now, published by Soul Deep Productions. For details, visit ourfavourite.shop**

John Weller and Bruce Foxton at the Rainbow Theatre soundcheck on 15 November 1980

Paul Weller at AIR Studios, 24 August 1981, during a break in the recording of *Absolute Beginners*

Above: One of the previously unseen images from the *Absolute Beginners* photoshoot in Chiswick House

Left: The Jam playing *Boy About Town* at The Hammersmith Palais on 15 December 1981

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06 JULY KELSO FLOORS CASTLE
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10 JULY LEEDS HAREWOOD HOUSE
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IAN PEEL'S A TO Z of POP

P IS FOR... PEEL SESSIONS

WHAT DO SQUEEZE, THE SPECIALS AND LEO SAYER ALL HAVE IN COMMON? THEY ALL HAD THE HONOUR OF RECORDING A SESSION FOR JOHN PEEL'S RADIO ONE SHOW. AND WHILE OTHER DJs FROM THE 80s ALL BROKE BANDS WITH SESSIONS AT MAIDA VALE STUDIOS, IT'S THE PEEL ARCHIVE THAT WE CAN TRULY SAY SHAPED THE COURSE OF POP HISTORY.

The Peel Sessions archive is so vast, in fact, that a complete A To Z of it would be impossible in a single issue of *Classic Pop*. Even the S's alone range from The Sugarcubes to Strawberry Switchblade, Stereo MCs to Squeeze via The Specials, The Shamen, The Selecter and even Leo Sayer.

There was a time when you had to listen to Radio One late at night to hear a Peel Session. Or perhaps tape it off the radio if you wanted to save it for the future. Then in 1986, Peel co-founded his own label, Strange Fruit, to release the sessions on vinyl. The label folded in 2004 but by then the internet had firmly taken hold and is now a simple go-to source for this rich and delightful parallel history of classic pop music.

Take Adam And The Ants for example. They recorded three Peel Sessions (all of which you can find on YouTube) beginning in January of 1978 for a set that kicked off with *Deutscher Girls* and ending in the Spring of 1979 with *Never Trust A Man With Egg On His Face*. Yes, this is the pre-Burundi version of the Ants and is a fascinating piece of post-punk documentary evidence.

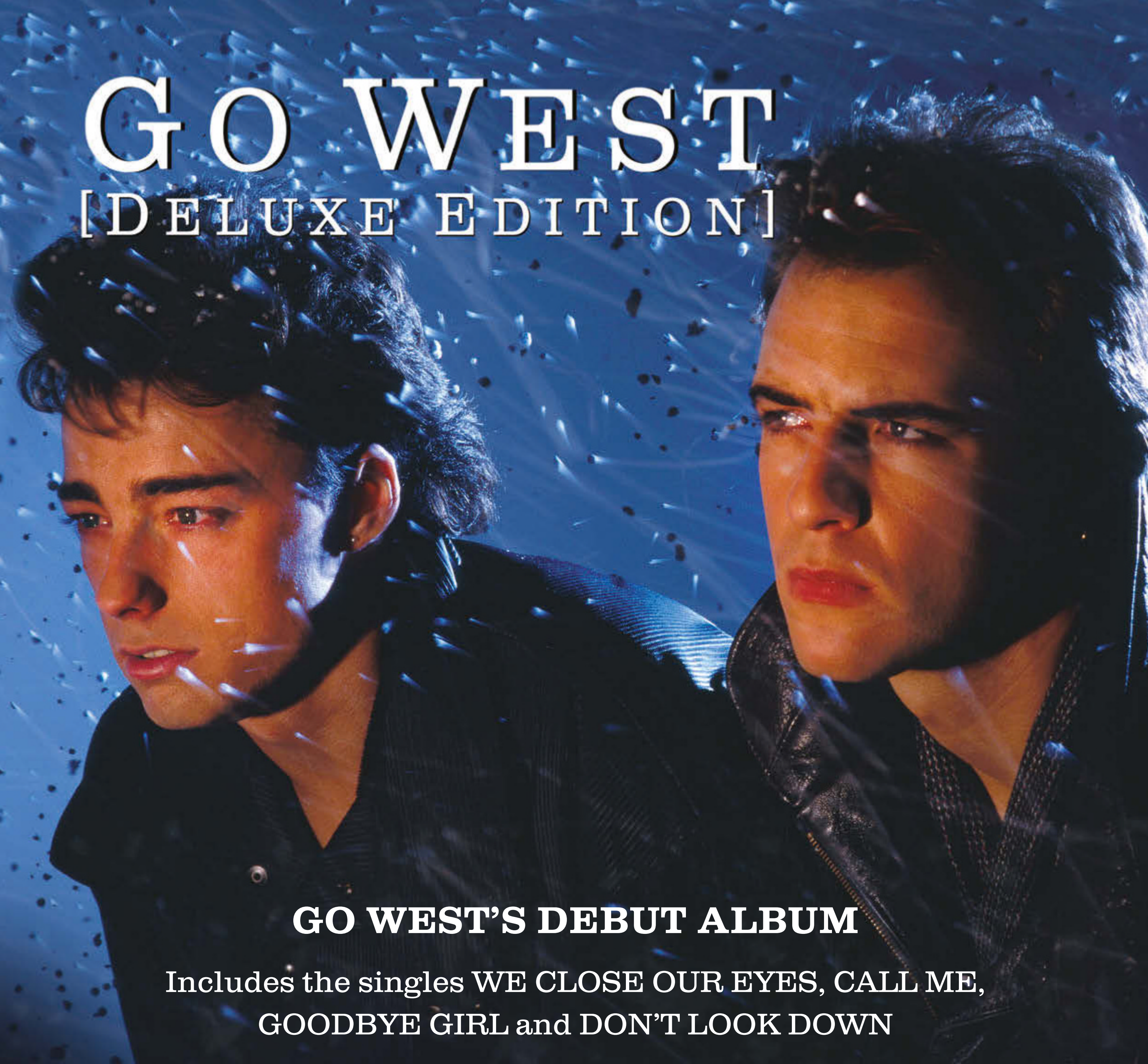
That's one of the most endearing things about the Peel Sessions archive. How it captures bands in a fleeting moment. They never took weeks or months in the studio to record their tracks. They were always all done in an afternoon, perhaps with one style or approach that a group never took again. The Beloved's first Peel Session, when Guy Gausden had only just joined, found them with a softer sound and Jon Marsh has said he'd wished they had stayed more in that style.

I think both Adam Ant and Jon Marsh would be the first to say that a Peel Session was as exciting for the artist recording it as it was for the listener tuning in to hear it at home. In an interview for the Elefant Records blog, Paul Court of The Primitives sets an evocative scene: "The studio was at Maida Vale in London. An ornate single-storey cake of a building with studios below the ground. It felt very much like being in the 1930s down there; I don't think much had been altered since then... The first couple of sessions we did were produced by Dale Griffin, the drummer from Mott The Hoople. You could tell he wasn't best pleased having to record all these musically inept bands... Hearing the session on the radio was a massive thrill. It would take a few weeks for it to appear on the show and they wouldn't let you take a tape away, so you couldn't really remember how it sounded."

> I THINK BOTH ADAM ANT AND JON MARSH WOULD BE THE FIRST TO SAY THAT A PEEL SESSION WAS AS EXCITING FOR THE ARTIST RECORDING IT AS IT WAS FOR THE LISTENER TUNING IN TO HEAR IT AT HOME

In addition to the more well-known names, I also love John Peel Sessions for its archive of near-misses and also-rans from the history of pop. Check out Rip Rig + Panic's 1981 session for a lovely piece of piano jazz that goes by the name of *A Grand Grin And A Shaky Smile Please Mr Barman*. Or the beat box party of Factory Records' Quando Quango with the track *Love Tempo* from 1983.

Some very rough maths tells me that there are about 8,000 tracks in the John Peel Sessions archive. Of which the poignant ambience of Shriekback's *Faded Flowers* recorded in June of 1985 is probably my absolute favourite. What's yours?



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THIS MONTH IN

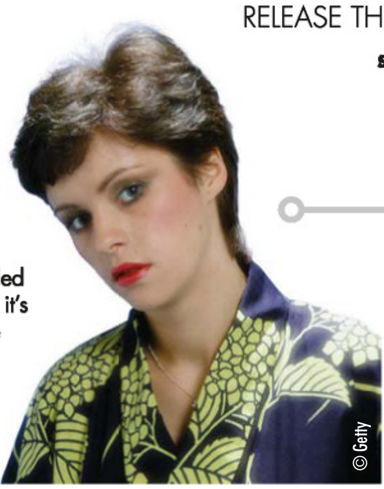
POP

MAY 1981

THIS MONTH, DIANA ROSS LEAVES MOTOWN, PIL ARE BOOED OFF STAGE AND TOYAH RELEASE THEIR MOST SUCCESSFUL ALBUM…

STEVE O'BRIEN

02 Sheena Easton hits No.1 in the US with *Morning Train (9 To 5)*. Titled *9 To 5* in the UK, it's changed in some territories to avoid confusion with Dolly Parton's hit.



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03 Adam And The Ants hit No.1 on the UK Singles Chart with *Stand And Deliver*. Their first chart-topper on home soil, it remains in pole position for five weeks.

03 Pink Floyd drummer Nick Mason releases his first solo LP, *Nick Mason's Fictitious Sports*. Robert Wyatt appears as a featured vocalist.

10 Kraftwerk release their eighth studio album, *Computer World*.

05 Craig David, the singer-songwriter behind hits including *Fill Me In* and *7 Days*, is born in Southampton.

15 Public Image Ltd perform at New York's Ritz Club posing behind a video screen while the music is played from a tape. The band are showered with missiles and eventually booed off stage.

12 Meat Loaf files for bankruptcy with debts of more than $1 million.

16 Former New Christy Minstrels member Kim Carnes starts a nine-week non-consecutive run at No.1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart with *Bette Davis Eyes*.

22 Toyah release their third and most successful studio album, *Anthem*, which peaks at No.2 on the UK charts.

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20 Diana Ross signs with RCA and leaves Motown after two decades. The $20 million deal is the most lucrative recording contract in history at that time.

11

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Bob Marley died on 11 May 1981 just four years after he was found to have a malignant melanoma under his toenail. The cancer subsequently spread throughout his body. His final show had been at the Stanley Theater in Pittsburgh on 23 September 1980, after which Marley admitted himself to a diet-based treatment clinic in Bavaria. After eight months, and with the cancer still spreading, he decided to fly back to Jamaica. His condition worsened on the flight and he was taken straight to hospital in Miami where he passed away, aged 36. His final words to his son Ziggy were "Money can't buy life."

Marley was granted a state funeral in Jamaica on 21 May, and was buried alongside his Gibson Les Paul guitar. Prime Minister Edward Seaga delivered the final eulogy, saying: "His voice was an omnipresent cry in our electronic world. His sharp features, majestic looks and prancing style a vivid etching on the landscape of our minds. Bob Marley was never seen. He was an experience which left an indelible imprint with each encounter. Such a man cannot be erased from the mind."

TOP 5 UK ALBUMS CHART 3 MAY 1981

1 KINGS OF THE WILD FRONTIER
ADAM AND THE ANTS

2 LIVING ORNAMENTS '79 AND '80
GARY NUMAN

3 CHARTBLASTERS '81
VARIOUS ARTISTS

4 THIS OLE HOUSE
SHAKIN' STEVENS

5 FUTURE SHOCK
GILLAN

POST-PUNK PIONEERS THE ASSOCIATES TRANSFORMED THEMSELVES INTO BONA FIDE POP STARS ON 1982'S SULK. ALAN RANKINE, MIKE HEDGES, MICHAEL DEMPSEY, SLEEVE PHOTOGRAPHER PETER ASHWORTH AND MARTYN WARE TAKE US INSIDE THEIR SKEWED MASTERWORK.

MATTHEW LINDSAY

© Peter Ashworth

"WE WERE FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS, GOING AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT"

The singer's singer: Billy Mackenzie performing on TV's ***The Tube***

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It's a Sunday in Linlithgow during 1977. Alan Rankine sits at the piano in his parents' lounge, it's covered in Billy Mackenzie's cigarette ash. Mackenzie travelled up from Dundee the night before, now the tea-sipping pair are nursing hangovers. Out of nowhere, an elegant, infectious melody comes to Rankine at the ivories, as memorable as ABBA's *Dancing Queen*'s from the previous year. It's the start of a song that writes itself and a sure-fire hit. Just not now, at punk's height, so the pair store it away safely for later use.

Fast forward to early 1982. The flash of inspiration in '77, *Party Fears Two*, has catapulted the duo, now Associates, onto *Top Of The Pops*.

Dry ice swamps the futuristic pipework-adorned stage. Mackenzie, clad in belted raincoat, dodgy hairdo concealed by black beret, is a star lost in his own little world, watching himself on the monitors, cheekily grinning as he shimmies. Rankine, holding a banjo, is decked out in a fencing suit, Samurai make-up, chopsticks in his hair. It's a thrilling, surreal sight beamed into millions of living rooms that Thursday night.

The timing for *Party Fears Two* is now perfect – it'll peak at No.9 in the UK, another magical sign that anything's possible in this new pop era. A few months later its parent album, *Sulk*, hailed as an instant masterpiece, will also storm the Top 10. For six or so glorious months, Rankine and Mackenzie find themselves at the centre of British pop.

They'd met in the mid-70s. Rankine dazzled by the singer performing with cod-funk act Stand And Deliver at Tiffany's Ballroom in Edinburgh. "I just had to get with that voice," he says now. The 18-year-old multi-instrumentalist lured Mackenzie away for his own band Caspian.

"At a rehearsal I noticed a forlorn look in Bill's eyes, as if he was saying, 'Help me, help me.' I invited him to live at my girlfriend's flat in Linlithgow and we were off and running."

Gigging under various monikers (Mike Lawrence Quintet, Mental Torture), the pair's emerging songbook tapped into an idiosyncratic reservoir of influences; big 60s emotions and orchestrations like Burt Bacharach, film composers, Kraftwerk and the sounds of Black America. Both loved art-glam (Bowie, Roxy, Sparks), covering *Boys Keep Swinging* for The Associates' debut single, reflected in Mackenzie's operatically jittery, stylised vocals. But the singer, raised on Dusty, Tom Jones, and jazzy torch singers like Billie Holiday, also had a searing soulful depth. Punk sharpened their edges, particularly Rankine's guitars and image. Minus long hair and Afghan coat, he became a photogenic match – part Jean-Jacques Burnel, part old Hollywood idol – for the doe-eyed Mackenzie.

> "I was hugely impressed by both Billy's singing and their simple songs in a complex setting"
>
> MICHAEL DEMPSEY

Despite Scotland's post-punk explosion that spawned Simple Minds, Scars, Orange Juice and Altered Images, The Associates were loners. "We always felt like outsiders, we didn't fit in anywhere, we didn't really want to. That whole 'sound of young Scotland', that wasn't us. We moved down to London," reflects Rankine.

Signed to Chris Parry's Fiction label, The Associates were joined by Michael Dempsey on bass (mostly live), a founding member of labelmates, The Cure: "They came down to my parent's house. I was hugely impressed by both Billy's singing and their deceptively simple songs in a complex setting, both familiar and highly original."

Australian drummer John Murphy, found via publicist Chris Carr, completed the rhythm section. Dempsey believes Murphy's "wild, rolling energy" is an oft-overlooked, original contribution to The Associates' sound (the *Eraserhead*-haired, punk-loving Murphy had been banging a kit since he was four).

Both Dempsey and Murphy were absent from debut album *The Affectionate Punch* (see below), co-produced by Mike Hedges, who'd also been instantly impressed. "They were extremely dynamic as a duo, very exciting to watch live, hyperactive, hyper-creative," he says now. "Billy was a genius, so was Alan." Rankine may have loathed the prog-related term 'virtuoso', but he was one. Hedges agrees: "He could play a piano stool and make it sound good."

Hedges had worked with The Cure and cut his teeth with Heatwave and *Evita*. He had not only, what Dempsey calls, "a good solid engineering background" but also "a mad, zany streak which appealed to us," Rankine adds. This willingness to experiment – he once tried to record drums

Billy Mackenzie had a complex and often conflicted relationship with playing live

"A kind of masterpiece"

Post-punk classics came thick and fast in 1980; *Sound Affects, The Correct Use Of Soap, Closer, Seventeen Seconds*… Joining them that August was The Associates' debut, *The Affectionate Punch*, co-produced with Mike Hedges in barely three weeks at Willesden's Morgan Studios. Alan Rankine played guitars, bass and keyboards, drums came from Nigel Glocker (Saxon, Toyah) and a Roland CR-78 while Hedges' *Evita* contact, Frank Ricotti, supplied marimba. For the title track, The Chanter Sisters (Roxy Music) and Vicki Brown provided backing vocals. Labelmate Robert Smith also added his BVs to *The Affectionate Punch* and *Even Dogs In The Wild*. A drunk trumpeter never made it to tape, a hapless bagpiper's buried in *Logan Time*'s mix. Fiction denied them colour for the Wormwood Scrubs-shot 'marathon' cover (both sporty youths – Rankine, a tennis prodigy, Mackenzie, a runner and footballer).

But it's really a showcase for the "hyperactive, hyper-creative" duo. Here rich musical ideas come in deceptively sparse settings. Throughout, their cabaret roots, plus glam and Euro-electronica are compressed into sinewy post-punk. Rankine's barbed wire guitars gnaw at multi-tracked pianos while Mackenzie croons and caws. Bowie-tinged (*Transport To Central*), it's still original and influential. Shivery atmospherics blow through the street corner jazz of *Even Dogs In The Wild*, and *A Matter Of Gender*'s chugging pop, the former resembling The Cure's *Lovecats*, the latter early Smiths. U2 were definitely listening, front row at Associates' Marquee residency, "watching me with my Space Echo," Rankine says. Bono put it more bluntly: "We ripped them off" (see *Paper House*).

A quickly-assembled debut from prolific songwriters, omissions included the glorious *Double Hipness* and *You Were Young*. But forget 1982's pointless redo, clogged with superfluous synths, the lean, mean original is best. True to its namesake, it's tough, twisted and tender, and, to quote the *NME*, "a kind of masterpiece".

The Associates in 1980. From left, Michael Dempsey, John Murphy, Alan Rankine and Billy Mackenzie.

© Getty

underwater – would make him perfect for The Associates.

After *The Affectionate Punch*'s August 1980 release, the band dropped the definitive article and The Cure-favouring Fiction. Parry retained publishing and paid their rent for months upfront, from September 1980 onwards at a flat in St John's Wood (damage done by a leaking fish tank would see them ejected from the 52 Carlton Hill residence).

1981, the "year of singles", Mackenzie declared, came with a sequence of Associates 45s, issued on independent Situation Two. Operating largely as a duo, they retreated into the studio. April's *Tell Me Easter's On Friday* and July's *Q Quarters* were recorded with Flood (Depeche Mode/U2) for just £100 at Morgan Studios. Despite the low budget, both were experimental and cinematic, especially *Q Quarters* with its John Barry-style drama, full of eerie echoes, coughs and footsteps as if it came from *The Third Man*'s sewers.

Nocturnal sessions – 9pm Sunday to 9am Monday – led to chemical excess. "We succumbed to the Columbian marching powder," Rankine says. "At 4am you hit a wall. We had Rick Wakeman banging on the door trying to get into his Monday morning session." Previously they'd just popped pills, dexys and blues, now a bad night with seven grams of speed landed the pair in hospital for four days, strapped up to heart monitors opposite one another.

By August's *Kitchen Person* ("a vicious surge of a song," marvelled *Melody Maker* at their Single Of The Week), they were back with Hedges at his new facility, Playground Studios, with more time and money. The sonic adventures revved up; Mackenzie sang down a vacuum cleaner, a juddering electric typewriter adding to the rhythm. "It's an assault on the senses," says Hedges. "We'd heard *Tiger Feet* was one of the loudest singles ever, we wanted an even louder cut."

Drum-powered electro-funk followed with October's *Message Oblique Speech*, while November's *White Car In Germany* tapped into 1981's synth-pop boom on its own terms. Magisterial Euro-decadence came drenched in reverb and surprises, seamless leaps from G-minor to G-major, flapping hardboard and Mackenzie singing through greaseproof paper and a comb. Throughout these singles – choice cuts compiled on the wonderful *Fourth Drawer Down* – instruments defy easy identification to psychedelic effect. Too disorienting sadly even for 1981's record buyers. As turntables span to *Vienna*, *Sound Of The Crowd* and *Tainted Love*, Mackenzie lamented that "ours got peeled off halfway through. That would soon change."

Amid the Situation Two Playground sessions, *Sulk*'s began. Conceived as a grand design, Rankine likened it to "this luxury embroidery thread in my mother's sewing box. We wanted to luxuriate in the sounds." Mackenzie's vision was similarly vivid: "ABBA meets Bet Lynch on acid" (translation: psychedelic, glamorous, working class pop). Chunks of *Sulk*, *No*, *Nude Spoons* and *It's Better This Way* were in their

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1980 live repertoire – instrumental opener *Arrogance Gave Him Up* had been their concert curtain-raiser. In the studio, these already-written songs mutated with layers of experimentation.

Party Fears Two and *Club Country*, demoed earlier at Morgan, secured Associates a lucrative deal with Beggars Banquet via Warner (independence, plus major label muscle, the perfect early 80s pop equation). Rankine and Mackenzie immediately signed over half of the £60,000 advance to Hedges. "We block-booked the studio so if we wanted a day or even week off, other acts could sublet it," says Rankine, who remembers returning to find The Cure had left a mountain of empty beer cans.

Located on Camden's Bayham Street, Playground was aptly titled. "I was given the opportunity to build my own studio," Hedges says. "I ordered everything that was my favourite, such as a Harrison console – ABBA and Michael Jackson used those. We had two 24-track multi-tracks, one modified into an echo machine. We had delays, phasers, flangers. There were EMT echo plates, digital reverb and Vocoders… It was an engineer's dream. All the best, brand new gear." If the world outside was grim (Rankine remembers seeing teens in the alley outside sniffing glue: "they looked like their faces were melting"), inside was a funhouse.

Sounds were layered atop click tracks, with drums overdubbed later. Conventional rock'n'roll was out, so John Murphy's tom-toms were replaced by snares, giving *Sulk* a fizzing rhythmic pop throughout. Drums aside, and Mackenzie's occasional one-string guitar, Rankine played most of the instruments – an ever-present Dempsey is only on *Skipping*. "Everything was set up so if I had inspiration for a sound I could just go to a synth or my guitar with its Marshall stacks and Roland Space Echo. The main synths I used were the Roland Jupiter-8, Prophet 5 and a lot of Synclavier. Those cutting, sharp strings on *Club Country*'s intro, that's Synclavier. I think we used Solinas elsewhere, too, for those, obviously not real strings." *Sulk*'s electronics came without sequencer assistance, adding, Dempsey says, to "its tight, yet human feel."

Songs were magically transformed. *No* became embossed with what Rankine calls "sort of Russian-Jewish folk melodies" from his piano, and Mackenzie's vocal embroidery, bellowing through Hedges' "hall of mirrors" echo. On one take the singer blew an expensive Neumann mic. For the intro, Hedges says they "got a flanger with the hum of a guitar amp going through it, the rest is a bunch of steel parcel banding… or a measuring tape!" With this supersized nod to the windswept start of Simon Dupree And The Big Sound's 1967 single *Kites* (an Associates favourite), its dark electronics and Bond-like cine-drama, *No* was just one of *Sulk*'s multi-tiered soundscapes. *Party Fears Two*'s Yamaha Grand-played

© Avalon

When Party Fears Two was released, radio play was heavy and the reviews ecstatic

piano motif, was captured, Hedges says, "With a Roland SM58 microphone, the top screwed off and laid on the soundbar, lid closed, top covered, running into an amp, flat out with full chorus."

Elsewhere, a jangle piano tinkles harpsichord-like under Mackenzie's booming vocal. Evocative of 60s baroque pop like The Zombies, while *Party Fears Two*'s celestial, synthetic intro puts it right on 80s pop's cutting edge. Equally bang up to date were *Club Country*'s doof-doofs, made by an electronic Simmons kit, all over ABC's records that year. Contributing to the superhuman radio-ready sound were guitars recorded half-speed, as electrifying played back at normal speed as the oscillator flange behind Mackenzie on the chorus.

Record label intervention was minimal. When Tarquin Gotch visited, the powder first offered to the A&R man by Rankine and Mackenzie was for anti-indigestion, not cocaine: "We eventually gave him the real thing," says Rankine. Tales of excess surround *Sulk*'s making, including blowing up balloons and condoms with helium. "We were getting a bit manic," laughs Rankine. However drug-induced the sometimes 16-hour sessions were, all recall them as creative and tightly focused: "We were firing on all cylinders, going at the speed of light," Rankine reflects.

"It was serious work. Billy was a hard taskmaster," says Hedges, who was issued with eccentric instructions by Mackenzie to make the sound "like grass, Egypt or coming from inside a sarcophagus." But the vocalist was mesmerising, too, Rankine recalling him excitedly ad-libbing *Skipping*'s melodies and lyrics. His words were just as cliché-free and fearless as his daredevil vocal chords. "Bill was fanatical about avoiding any well-trodden path," Dempsey says, hence *Skipping*'s beguiling poetry. *Party Fears Two*'s jaw-dropping climax was another vocal highlight, the singer revelling in his voice's elasticity, like a human synthesizer. "As he sang, he'd be hearing himself through all the flangers, reverbs and delays," says Hedges. "The effects were part of the performance, not added later. Billy and Alan were very spontaneous."

Besides sharing an absurd sense of humour, the duo had an almost telepathic bond. "They knew exactly what they were doing. Making *Gloomy Sunday*, it took minutes for Billy to alight on a setting for this Billie Holiday cover, and an equal time for Alan to organise and communicate it," Dempsey says, turning the 1930s Hungarian suicide song into an unlikely floorfiller. Nevertheless *Sulk* was exhausting, after the final mix at Camden's Roundhouse Studios, Rankine burst into

© REX

tears – "I wasn't sad, it was a release of nervous tension."

They'd torn through Warner's advance, holed up at Swiss Cottage's Holiday Inn with Dempsey in one room and Mackenzie's beloved, room service-feasting whippets in another. Consuming cocaine and cashmere, they even had two cars, a Mercedes 1963 Convertible and cumbersome Ford Dorchester, both driven by Dempsey.

Luckily success soon came with the pop star-style spending. *Sulk*'s first single, *Party Fears Two*, was released early in 1982. Radio play was heavy and the reviews ecstatic: "A big, big song with a big, big voice… deserves to be a big, big hit," said *Smash Hits*' new scribe Neil Tennant.

Apparently taking its title from two girls that Mackenzie's brother saw gatecrashing a party in Dundee, hurling stilettos at a door, *Party Fears Two*'s immediacy came shrouded in mystery. Euphoria and melancholy collide, the fractured words could be a self-portrait in a cracked mirror. After that final take-off (pop's most transcendental moment?), Mackenzie sings the opening lines to himself, as if the ravishing, filmic pop song had been a dream.

Top Of The Pops beckoned, as it climbed the charts. Associates' performances that year are now legendary, but the show's long hours and early starts were "boring" for Rankine and "a disappointment" for Dempsey. Ex-Martha And The Muffins' Martha Ladly, then dating sleeve designer Peter Saville, had joined, adding occasional backing vocals, live keyboards and Mari Wilson-style televisual appeal. But John Murphy was gone, overheard by Mackenzie on the phone bemoaning the pop band he drummed in, replaced by Steve Goulding.

Blue sky thinking: Rankine and Mackenzie were radical when it came to studio experimentation

"We glued Dave Lee Travis' dressing room doors together - he'd slagged us off on the radio"

ALAN RANKINE

Rankine and Mackenzie's writing partnership would end in October 1982

© Avalon

High-profile viewers had tuned in to see Associates on *TOTP*. One was Martyn Ware, whose British Electric Foundation featured Mackenzie on show-stopping covers, *It's Over* and *The Secret Life Of Arabia*. Another was Bryan Ferry who borrowed Dempsey, Ladly and Goulding for European TV promotion of Roxy Music's *Avalon*.

The buzz intensified with *Sulk*'s May release. The title dripped with phonetic associations, contracting sultry and silk. "It just seemed to fit," says Rankine, just like the striking Peter Ashworth-shot sleeve (see boxout). Inside was everything they had been working towards – a dense, swirling, sensuous masterpiece. *Arrogance Gave Him Up* opened *Sulk* the way *Speed Of Life* had Bowie's *Low*. Throughout *Sulk*'s textural overload and crackling invention, Spector-ian walls of sound meet the electronic 80s. Side A's assault course of forward-thinking torch songs and post-punk freak-outs (the barmy *Bap De La Bap* and *Nude Spoons* sadly missing from the US tracklisting), and Side B's ultra-pop masterclass. The music press went into justifiable hyperbolic overdrive about the 'supernatural' Associates and *Sulk*'s "timeless majesty". *Melody Maker*'s Album Of The Year came sandwiched between *Dare* and *The Lexicon Of Love*, when pop's possibilities were ever-expanding, when the Top 10 could be occupied by *O Superman*, *Ghosts* or *Being Boiled*. Lush like ABC, soaring like *New Gold Dream*, and experimental like *The Dreaming* (and Hedges' next project, *A Kiss In The Dreamhouse*), *Sulk* was really unlike anything before or since.

The best early 80s pop seized on everything the era offered stylistically and technologically while remaining sceptical of its values. *Sulk*'s second single, *Club Country*, written, Rankine says, during June and July of 1980, eviscerated the New Romantics' supposedly hollow nightlife and vacuous style. "We went to Billy's, Blitz, Le Beat Route. I was always bored within 10 minutes, it felt so snobby," reflects Rankine. Predating *Blue Monday* by almost a year with its modern dance moves – it's widely cited as proto-house – *Club Country* made No.13. But Rankine sensed a change in Mackenzie during their second *TOTP* performance... "Nothing I could put my finger on..." he says. "something was up."

Like *Party Fears Two*, amid *Club Country*'s ecstatic, athletic rush were lyrical warning signs, flickering like a distress flare: "Every breath you breathe belongs to someone there." Blitz kid bashing when they were written perhaps but now Associates were bona fide pop stars, they took on a whole new meaning. Behind Mackenzie's flamboyant rascal demeanour, the tomfoolery and cryptic lyrics was a hyper-sensitive soul, with fame bringing unwanted attention. Returning home to Dundee had made him a target for abuse. Not that Mackenzie wasn't tough. While staying at rock star haunt, London's Columbia Hotel, Rankine remembers him pulverising a group bullying Marc Almond. "He decked them all in seconds."

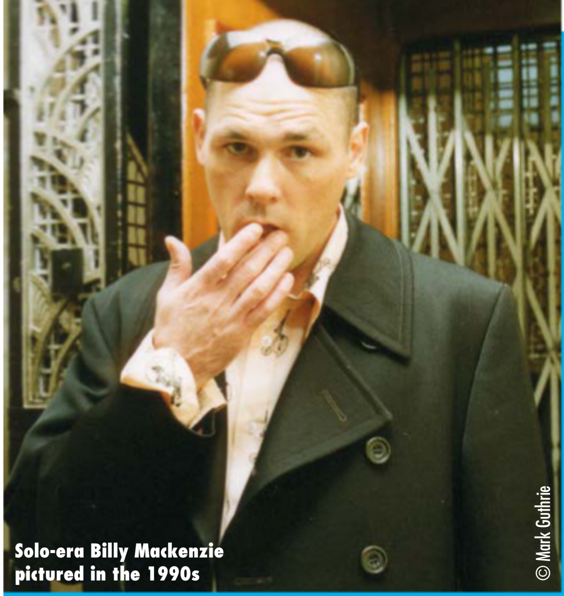
1982's third single, *18 Carat Love Affair*, was their frothiest confection yet (an instrumental mix of its synth-driven 60s-inflected pop, titled *Nothinginsomethingparticular*, closed *Sulk*). Composed in 1978, "It's a gay love song, Bill told me," Rankine says. "I knew Bill was gay the first time I met him, 90 per cent gay or already LGBTQ+." He adds: "actually Bill would shag moving hair on a barber's floor."

The single's other side, an orgasmic reworking of *Love Hangover*, contained Rankine's favourite Mackenzie vocal: "It wasn't his song so he felt removed from it. He had so much fun recording it."

18 Carat Love Affair's August *Top Of The Pops* performance came with two Harrods-made chocolate Jaguar guitars, bringing one for backup in case the other melted under the lights. After handing the fretboard to Mackenzie, Rankine fed the remains to the audience. They clashed with producer Michael Hurll: "I think he was mad that he hadn't thought of the guitars! We also glued Dave Lee Travis' dressing room doors together – he'd slagged us off on the radio," says Rankine.

Bafflingly, *18 Carat Love Affair* stalled at No.21. "Billy was very upset about that," says Hedges. But Mackenzie's ambivalence towards success rose to the surface. In *Smash Hits*' August cover feature, when asked about ambition, Rankine mapped out his future with a clear-eyed vision, though Mackenzie sounded more uncertain.

Bono dubbed Billy a disco ball of nerves. And he was. He was also full of contradictions, a showman who hated



Solo-era Billy Mackenzie pictured in the 1990s

© Mark Guthrie

confronting an audience nightly, a talent of immense diva-style proportions who hated the glare of the media. Being thrust into the limelight exposed the duo's differences. Rankine accepted the pop machine's necessary evils, Mackenzie, forever in pursuit of that 'magical feeling', found it a disenchanting grind. "He hated touring. Hated the repetition of miming songs he'd recorded two years ago," says Rankine. "None of success' requirements were part of his nature," Dempsey says. But he was equally afraid of failure. Being sequestered in the studio for *Sulk*'s making had made the singer comfortable there. The daunting task of recreating it onstage with a 'messy' nine-piece band led him to cancel a tour the night before its Edinburgh debut. Later, Sire's Seymour Stein would put America and vast sums of cash on the table at Langan's Brasserie. Mackenzie declined. For Rankine it was the last straw – by October '82, he'd officially quit. Sessions for a new album at Bahamas' Compass Point were cancelled.

Mackenzie soldiered on, releasing *Ice Cream Factory* (with Orbidöig) before the year's end, when Simon Le Bon named him his favourite male singer of 1982 in *Smash Hits*. He'd remain a singer's singer, beloved by all from Jim Kerr and Martin Fry to Siouxsie, Marc Almond and Björk. "Most pop stars knew he could sing the pants off them," says Rankine. Without Alan, Associates were still sporadically brilliant. 1985's *Perhaps* featured superlative highlights *Those First Impressions* and *The Stranger In Your Voice*. Collaborations with Yello, like Shirley Bassey belter *The Rhythm Divine*, and 1991's gorgeous flop single *Baby*, cannot be dismissed. But without his alchemist Rankine, records like 1990's *Wild And Lonely* were marred by unsympathetic production. Billy was dropped by Warner after *The Glamour Chase*, unreleased until 2002.

"Fifty per cent of what makes those records great is down to Alan," says Ware, who worked on *Perhaps*. "I don't think Billy realised how hard it would be without him." Play the Rankine-assisted Peel session of *Waiting For The Loveboat* and you can hear what's missing from the (still fine) eventual release, something odder, funkier, sexier. The former's one of many treasures lurking on *Sulk*'s three-disc 40th anniversary deluxe edition, along with demos, B-sides and other radio sessions.

After leaving, Rankine went solo (*The World Begins To Look Her Age*) and produced (Cocteau Twins, Paul Haig). But both men seemed adrift without one another, each missing the other half of their musical whole. "We went too far, too fast," said Mackenzie in 1985, vowing he'd work with Rankine again (a Spring 1993 reunion was short-lived). "Maintaining the kind of creative energy they had together can be destructive," says Hedges.

Both Rankine and Dempsey now see *Sulk* as a flawed masterpiece; Hedges says: "Billy would hate me saying this but *Sulk* is music becoming an art form; something in the anarchy, chaos, the strange sounds, is taking it to another level." Musicians singing its praises include U2 and the Manics. "Associates were massively influential," reflects Ware.

Sulk is not just reflective of a wild and glorious time in pop music but an enduring example of what it can be in the hands of visionaries, going "too far, too fast" and over the top without label interference. Right now, current pop needs a few lessons from *Sulk*.

Just before Mackenzie's suicide, Hedges says he'd met him with plans to make an album. His final flourish with Apollo 440, 1997's *Pain In Any Language*, showed his mercurial genius had not faded, even if the will to live had. Old friends penned elegies, Siouxsie on The Creatures' *Say* and The Cure's heartbreaking *Cut Here*. It's perhaps unwise to view him through the prism of personal, private tragedy. Think of him this way: in a London studio in 1981, Rankine not far away, voice soaring skywards as *Party Fears Two* reaches that heavenly ascension.

● ***Sulk* is reissued via BMG on 15 July and reviewed on page 94**

© Peter Ashworth

An explosion of colour

"The first sleeve I was captivated by was Hendrix's *Smash Hits*. It brought exotica into the family living room," explains photographer Peter Ashworth. You could say the same for his *Sulk* sleeve, shot in 1982 in a conservatory "somewhere in South London", on colour transparency with a Hasselblad camera using a 60mm medium wide lens.

Ashworth calls it "an explosion of colour" just like the thread in mother Rankine's sewing box that inspired *Sulk*'s sound. Yuccas, ferns and ivy ("weird plants to 80s holidaymakers," says Ashworth) are lit by 10 blue and green gels glowing under dust sheets covering park benches and "ugly" brick walls. Amid the lava lamp-like setting the duo sit, looking, Ashworth reckons, "a bit like bouncers", simultaneously safeguarding and luring you into their wonder-house. Full of mixed messages; ultra-pop glamour and anti-pop mingle, the pair's slightly bored, bemused poses predate Pet Shop Boys. Rankine's two huge Scott Crolla cashmere scarves and his "otherworldly"-style pose, deliberately disrupted with his half-closed eyes. For Ashworth the contrast is key. "They brought something unexpected to it," he says, chiefly the rebel punk that streaked through early 80s pop.

"Record companies treated sleeves as throwaway. I was always getting grief for shooting with exotic colours, here and with Dave Ball's *In Strict Tempo*," reflects Ashworth. "But I was blown away when I saw it, the image bleeding to the edges, the title almost hidden. Did everything a cover should – informed, misled, teased, entertained." Now hanging in the National Portrait Gallery, *Sulk*'s cover elevated the form into art, just like the record inside did with pop.

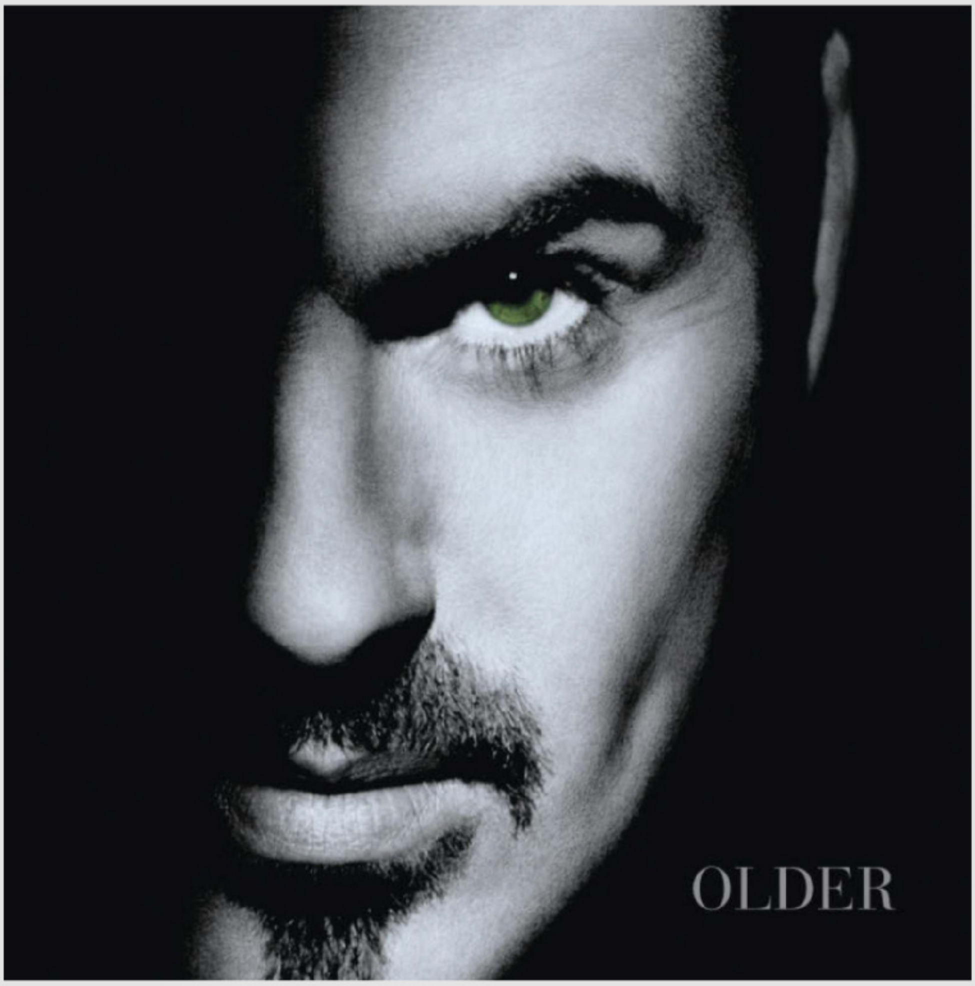
CLASSIC ALBUM

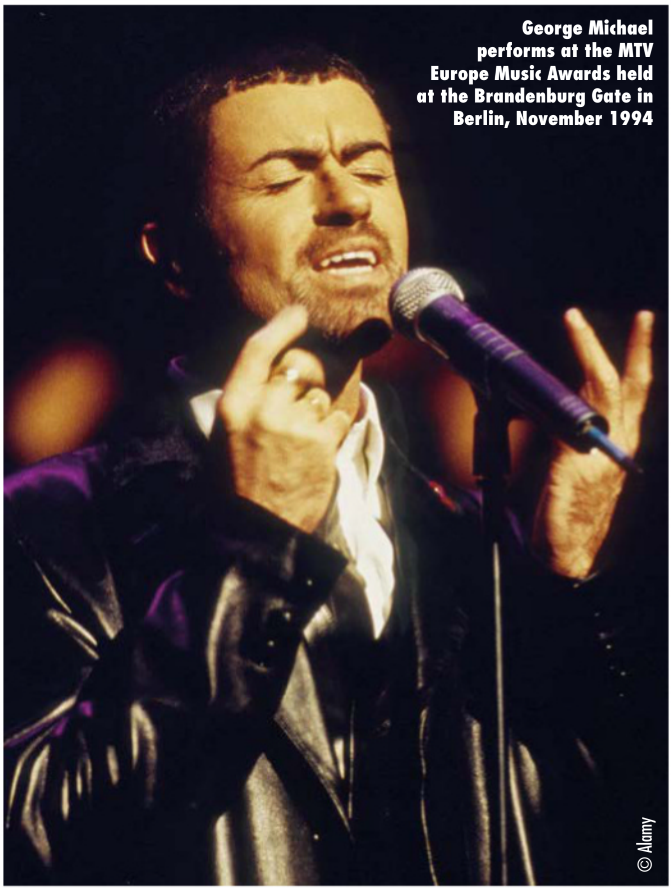
OLDER

GEORGE MICHAEL

INSPIRED BY THE GRIEF OF LOSING HIS PARTNER, GEORGE MICHAEL'S EXPANSIVE, HIT-FILLED MASTERPIECE WAS AMONGST THE MOST POWERFUL STATEMENTS OF HIS CAREER

IAN WADE





George Michael performs at the MTV Europe Music Awards held at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, November 1994

© Alamy

While the gap between *Older* and George Michael's previous album – 1990's *Listen Without Prejudice Vol 1* – had been approaching six years, the singer hadn't exactly been idle during that time. Despite not wishing to tour the album, George's time was mostly spent trying to extricate himself from his Sony contract. Following the end of Wham!, he'd signed a new eight-album solo deal with the label in 1988, and after the blockbusting success of his debut solo LP *Faith* selling 14 million copies worldwide, he renegotiated the deal befitting his new status, and to give him the sort of comeback that reflected other acts of that stature.

Listen Without Prejudice Vol 1 – despite him not wanting to promote it to the degree that he'd done with *Faith*, or having his face on the sleeve – fared relatively poorly in comparison with just five million sales. His argument was that the label had decided to not promote *Listen Without Prejudice* due to his decisions, and that it also would restrict him from having any control over his image or seeking out a new deal. George posited that the set-up of Sony, and indeed the wider music industry, led to an imbalance of power and that the label existed to just sell music and to have full say over what his future material and releases were.

Under the terms of the 1990 contract, George had been advanced £1 million in 1992 to start on *Listen Without Prejudice*'s follow-up, which was returned to the company later that year ahead of filing the lawsuit in October. However, George lost the case, as the judge pointed out he'd basically agreed to the contract's terms by requesting an advance in 1992, and that the label had every right to expect a recoupment of the costs they'd laid out. Although George stated he'd no longer record for Sony even if he lost the case, the label sold the contract to rival record companies Virgin and DreamWorks in 1995.

UNDER THE TERMS OF THE 1990 CONTRACT, GEORGE HAD BEEN ADVANCED £1 MILLION TO START ON LISTEN WITHOUT PREJUDICE'S FOLLOW-UP

Virgin were granted worldwide rights with DreamWorks working the album in the US and Canada – all of these releases were to be co-labelled with Aegean Records, a record company set up by George and cousin Andros Georgiou in 1991.

Not only did George have all this on the go, he also fell in love, when in 1991 he met Anselmo Feleppa, a Brazilian fashion designer at Rock In Rio. By the time the two had established their relationship, Feleppa discovered that he was HIV-positive, and died in March 1993 as a result of an AIDS-related brain haemorrhage.

During all this, George still worked. The Cover To Cover Tour ran from January until October 1991, a jaunt that he claimed was to allow him to perform some of his favourite songs rather than a full-on promotion of *Listen Without Prejudice*. It birthed a No.1 single with *Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me*, a duet with Elton John, which they'd first performed together at Live Aid in 1985. This was followed in 1992 by *Too Funky* – George's final Sony single – which he had originally planned to be part of *Listen Without Prejudice*'s follow-up, but instead donated it, alongside two other songs, to the *Red Hot + Dance* compilation raising money for AIDS awareness. It reached No.4 that June ahead of his court case. After appearing with Queen at the Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert in April 1992, his version of *Somebody To Love* alongside a duet with Lisa Stansfield on *These Are The*

THE PLAYERS

GEORGE MICHAEL
After a successful career as one half of Wham!, during which he sowed the seeds for a solo career, George racked up a series of massive hits across the world during the late 80s and 90s since his award-winning *Faith* debut, propelling him into legendary status. Despite increasing gaps between studio albums, he was rarely out of the public eye, until his tragic death in 2016.

JON DOUGLAS
Producer
Once billed as 'the next George Michael', Douglas started his career working on music with Ian Levine. He was mentored by Rod Temperton leading to him becoming an in-demand songwriter, producer, remixer and arranger for Gabrielle, Eternal, Kylie Minogue, Whitney Houston, Tom Jones and many more.

DAVID AUSTIN
Co-writer
Austin launched his career in 1984 with a little help from his former busking partner George on uncredited backing vocals. The pair would collaborate on a succession of tracks such as *You Have Been Loved, December Song, John And Elvis Are Dead* and *Look At Your Hands.* Austin was George's best friend, and latterly became his manager.

PETE GLEADALL
Programming
Pete's association with George began when he was brought in to work on his Faith tour as a programmer, leading to collaborating on *Listen Without Prejudice, Older* and *Patience* as well as his 25 Live tour. From his first credits as programmer on Aswad's *Distant Thunder* album, Pete has worked extensively with Pet Shop Boys, along with U2, Take That and Robbie Williams.

PAUL GOMERSALL
Engineer
Paul worked as an engineer for George on his *Faith* and *Older* albums, as well as *MTV Unplugged.* He has also worked on albums either in a mastering or engineering capacity by Blur, Kate Bush, Prefab Sprout, Phil Collins, Thomas Dolby, Robert Palmer and Paul Weller.

George on the set of the *Fastlove* video

© REX

"[GEORGE] WOULD SHUT EVERYONE OUT OF THE STUDIO AND BE ON THE PLAYSTATION OR WATCHING RICHARD & JUDY"

JON DOUGLAS

Days Of Our Lives appeared on the *Five Live* EP which also reached No.1 in April 1993.

Re-emerging grief-stricken and still in label limbo in November 1994, George appeared at the inaugural *MTV Europe Music Awards*, where he performed *Jesus To A Child*. Although it would be another 14 months before he'd release the song, it marked the end of the period where he felt he couldn't write due to his losses. *Jesus To A Child* was his first attempt and written fairly quickly in just two hours. In the 2017 *Red Line* interview with Kirsty Young, George said: "Within probably a day, the track was almost finished, which is *really* unusual for me. And within a week, I was singing it in front of the Brandenburg Gate because I was so excited I was writing again. I could write again and not only that but I'd written probably the most personal song I'd ever written in the space of a day. It was all systems go from that point on."

For the six-month duration while recording *Older*, George seemed as though he had finally got his songwriting groove back. Unfortunately, during that time he discovered his mother had been diagnosed with cancer; she died early in 1997.

The making of *Older* was taken at a leisurely pace over 1995, when George returned to

THE SONGS

1 JESUS TO A CHILD
An understated return perhaps – a bit long at 6:51, and not exactly the first song you'd choose from an artist making a comeback album six years on from his last – but *Jesus To A Child* was something different, and it set the tone for *Older* perfectly. The track ended an 18-month period of George's grief-induced inability to write, following the death of his lover Anselmo Feleppa in 1993. George debuted it at the *MTV Europe Music Awards* in 1994, and the recorded version was his first solo No.1 single in a decade since 1986's *A Different Corner*, and his first to debut at the top slot. It was also the highest new entry, at No.7, by a British artist for more than 25 years on the Billboard chart. George would continue to dedicate it to Anselmo every time he performed it. "It's a special song," he told *8 Days* magazine. "It was one of those that just felt like it was handed to me. I didn't have to try very hard. It came naturally. It was recorded over five days but written in just a couple of hours."

2 FASTLOVE
George's hymn to the joys of carefree sex followed *Jesus To A Child* to No.1 in April, aided by a video which encapsulated the virtual reality joys of polysexual temptation. His seventh and final No.1 during his lifetime, it was also his last hit in the US, charting at No.8. The track won an Ivor Novello award for most performed work the following year. Although the song interpolates the riff from Patrice Rushen's *Forget Me Nots*, it's actually sung by Jo Bryant. The single was backed by an updated version of *I'm Your Man '96*, which is also featured in the promo-only nine-minute *Fastlove Pt II (Fully Extended Mix)*.

3 OLDER
A moody jazz glide wherein George addresses a lover who clearly thinks that the singer will go back to them, but George has other ideas and doesn't wish to fall into the trap again. Peaking at No.3 in the UK, *Older* was the poorest-performing single off the album, though it was a Top 10 hit in Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, and Spain. It also came backed with George's take on Bonnie Raitt's *I Can't Make You Love Me*, which became one of his most celebrated covers.

4 SPINNING THE WHEEL
The third single to be released from the album, *Spinning The Wheel* details the considerations of an open relationship where one side is increasingly sexually promiscuous compared to the other, and the risks that such a lifestyle could have on that partnership, as well as the level of 'tough love' when the injured party finally walks out on such behaviour. It entered the chart at No.2, denied the top spot due to Spice Girls' unstoppable *Wannabe* racking up a sixth week in pole position.

5 IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER
The intimate whisper – the feeling as if George is addressing someone that he has some form of grievance with – "It doesn't matter that I failed to break down your father's wall" – as though there's some regret that George was unable to cut through to his lover's father. The vocal track was taken from Sarm and worked on at engineer Paul Gomersall's home studio, as the distracting saliva noises within the actual singing needed to be removed.

6 THE STRANGEST THING
The eastern-tinged *The Strangest Thing* has an almost instantly exotic, catchy refrain that weaves around for six minutes, dwelling upon some form of inner turmoil – "The only

Sarm West Studios – where he'd conjured up *Listen Without Prejudice* – and reunited with engineer Paul Gomersall, whose professional relationship with George had gone way back. Gomersall had assisted Chris Porter on early Wham! records as well as sessions on *Faith* in 1987. As George preferred to keep his working team quite regular, and as Porter had decided to move into production for other acts and quit the *Older* sessions, Gomersall took a more prominent role in the work on the LP. Speaking to *Sound On Sound* around the release of *Older*, Gomersall recalled: "It was very different this time around, with George a lot more in control, and playing most of the keyboards and bass guitar. We've used a lot more computers and synths on this album than George was accustomed to, and now that the technology has improved so much, along with his grasp of it, he's doing a lot more himself, as opposed to bringing in a lot of musicians."

George was very much calling the shots, although he'd rarely come in with any songs written. Much of *Older* was created in the studio. "I sat at a keyboard in some studios in Notting Hill, which was where I'd recorded a lot of *Faith*," he explained in the *Red Line* interview. "I played a very simple string part [on it], then added a very, very gentle guitar part. My way of making music is very strange. Generally, I put my backing tracks together very simply on keyboards. In this case, I think I'd added a little guitar. But the moment I think there's something important coming, I shove everybody out of the room."

Producer Jon Douglas agreed, explaining that with a pot of spliffs beside him George would shut everyone out of the studio and either play on a PlayStation or watch Richard and Judy on TV. With his headphones and Sony mic set up, George would sit and take a track then dream up the first line.

As Gomersall concurred to *Sound on Sound*: "He arrived with the songs in his head, and whenever he was ready to lay something down, he'd call the guys into the studio and spend a few hours getting a basic backing track on tape, and then they'd leave."

***Older* was informed by George's feelings of grief**

© PA Photos

Gomersall was very much at George's disposal, and knew exactly what he wanted once a song had manifested itself. From the start of the sessions, the studio desk was in 'mix mode' with George writing lyrics and melodies on the hoof while he was creating the song.

Older was very much George's 'gay' album – lyrically, thematically, even down to his own look. Even though he'd technically not 'come out' yet. His way of answering such questions were along the line of this in *The Big Issue*: "Even though my sexuality hasn't always been completely clear to me, it was never a moral

one who ever knew me/ We've wasted so much time" – could be a reflection on Anselmo (basically every song here could be attributed to his relationship) and how George finally found himself when he fell in love with him. Released as a double A-side with *You Have Been Loved* in a remixed danced-up version as *The Strangest Thing '97*, which worked perhaps better than the moody swirl of the original.

7 TO BE FORGIVEN

Older is dedicated to Antônio Carlos Jobim, the Brazilian composer who popularised a jazzy, Latin form of bossa nova, especially with the singer Astrud Gilberto, with whom he had a massive hit with *The Girl From Ipanema* – one of the most covered songs of all time. George had covered Jobim's *Desafinado* with Gilberto for the *Red Hot + Rio* album in 1996, and was clearly inspired to the dreamy, sandy swaying smoothness, underpinning many a song with Jobim's signature style, such as this.

8 MOVE ON

The mellow moods of Jobim seep in again on the following number, *Move On*, which feels like it was recorded to sound live in a small club. Time and healing are both significant motifs throughout the album. It's as if George is singing to an earlier version of himself, telling him that moving on is fine and how "don't waste time 'cause even angels say goodbye".

9 STAR PEOPLE

Segued in from *Move On*, it's a bit discombobulating after knowing the beefed-up remixed single version of *Star People '97*, that the album track is far more laid-back. George appears to be addressing an unspecified member of showbiz, who has driven themselves to be famous for fame's sake at any cost, yet still full of insecurities and demons – you could easily flick through any number of people from the mid-90s cokey Met Bar set who the singer may be alluding to. The tougher remake sampled The Gap Band's *Burn Rubber On Me* and was worked on and remixed by the combined talents of Jeremy Healy, Amos, Mike Koglin, and Forthright falling more in line with the groove of *Fastlove*.

10 YOU HAVE BEEN LOVED

A co-write with longtime friend David Austin, *You Have Been Loved* is one of George's most beautiful songs. As he said himself that Anselmo had inspired the entire album, this and *Jesus To A Child* were the key tracks that dealt with his grief at finding real love and then losing it. Released as a single in September 1997, its timing coincided with the aftermath of the death of Princess Diana, and indeed its No.1 ambition was thwarted by Elton John's zeitgeisty *Candle In The Wind* remake.

Even some 18 months since the release of the album, the song's success was in part – as well as being heartbreaking and gorgeous – due to the national mood of mourning when the radio playlists were full of gentle, unobtrusive ballads. As the *Sunday Mirror*'s reviewer put it: "Considering recent events, it strikes the perfect chord."

11 FREE

Jobim's influence hovers over George once more, nodding more to the Stan Getz/Astrud Gilberto sound. But this is an almost a string-drenched reprise of the title track, and originally twice as long, and grows into an assemblage with nods and melodies picked up from each of the album's other tracks, ending with George saying, "It feels good to be free."

THE VIDEOS

JESUS TO A CHILD
Dir: Howard Greenhalgh

Helmed by Howard Greenhalgh, who'd primarily made videos for Pet Shop Boys as well as Suede and Elton, *Jesus To A Child* is mostly muted tones and meaningful tropes – full of the 90s video staples where the star is often filmed half-lit. It cuts away to extras crouching in sand, lying on wet rocks or symbolically holding hands while sitting in crates on still water. There are shadows of metronomes, people vanishing down long hallways – you name it. If anything, the song, and George, would've been best served just as a straightforward performance.

FASTLOVE
Dir: Vaughan Arnell and Anthea Benton

Vaughan Arnell and Anthea Benton had worked with Take That, Dead Or Alive and Terence Trent D'Arby, before going their separate ways with Arnell notably teaming up extensively across Robbie Williams' career. George starts in a chair made out of speakers with a remote control and appears to flick through virtual reality examples of various sexual characteristics and options, basically inventing Tinder a decade or so ahead of schedule. The headphones with FONY written in the style of Sony is a nice dig, too, and it's the most animated dancing he'd done in years, when scenes show him throwing shapes in some indoor rain.

SPINNING THE WHEEL
Dir: Vaughan Arnell and Anthea Benton

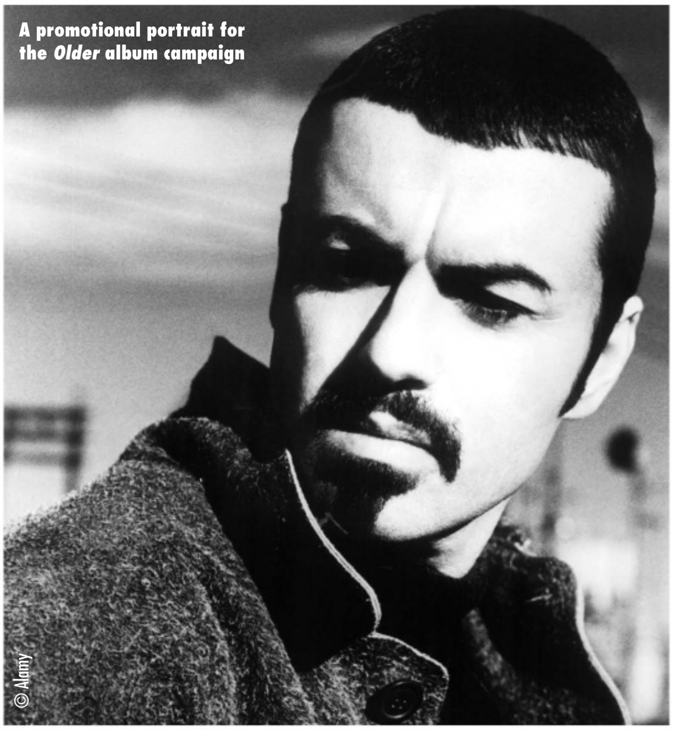
A stylish black and white affair featuring George performing in a club with a band with a distinct Cotton Club/swing-era aesthetic, while cutting off to stylised shots of models in varying gender-defying set-ups. It's a perfect match for the song as Arnell and Benton seem to get the gist of the *Older* campaign slightly better than perhaps *Jesus To A Child*'s numbingly meaningful stillness did.

OLDER
Dir: Andy Morahan

British director Andy Morahan's professional relationship with George goes back a long way, starting with Wham!'s *I'm Your Man* video and later tracks *I Want Your Sex* and *Faith*. The soft focus, sun-hued mood being his signature look, exampled here as George mooches about, all tidily-bearded in a long coat while a woman in white has a dance, a lone trumpeter sequestered somewhere mimes the brass part and religious iconography is glimpsed throughout.

STAR PEOPLE '97 / YOU HAVE BEEN LOVED
Dir: Milton Lage

The 'videos' for the last two singles taken from *Older* came from his *MTV Unplugged* performance filmed in October 1996.



A promotional portrait for the *Older* album campaign

© Alamy

"NOT TO PUT A DEDICATION TO [ANSELMO] WOULD BE LUDICROUS. BEREAVEMENT TINGES THE WHOLE ALBUM."

GEORGE MICHAEL

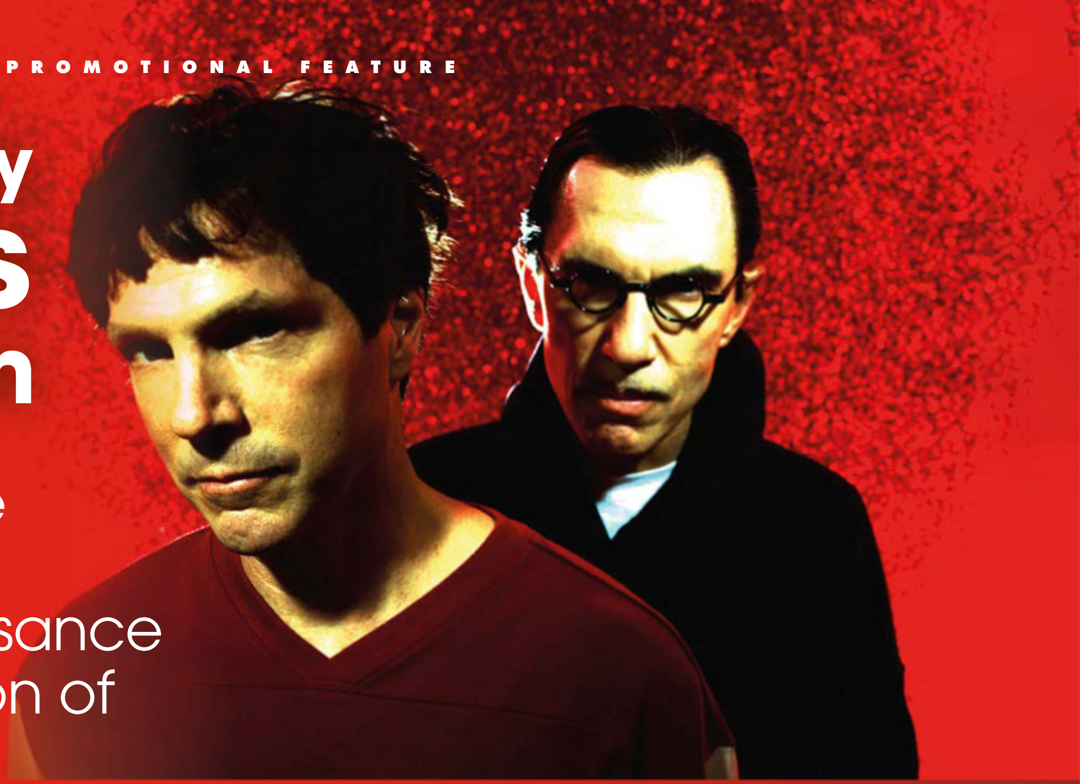
question. I've never thought of my sexuality as being right or wrong… Anyway, who really cares whether I'm gay or straight? Do they think they've got a serious chance of shagging me or something?" Yet, he also said: "To my fans and the people that were really listening, I felt like I was trying to come out with them."

Speaking of how his relationship with Anselmo had inspired him to the *Daily Mirror* in 1997, George said: "Not to put a dedication to him would be ludicrous because so much of it was about him. Bereavement tinges the whole album."

Older sold 281,000 copies in its first week in the UK, and was, until the Spice Girls, Virgin's fastest-selling LP of all time. It went on to be George's biggest-selling album in the UK, shifting a total of 1.8 million copies. It would sell five million across Europe and a million in the US. *Older*'s six singles were also his most successful to be released from an album in the UK, with two No.1s (*Jesus To A Child*, *Fastlove*), three No.2s (*Spinning The Wheel*, *Star People '97*, *You Have Been Loved*) and one No.3 (the title track). An expanded version, entitled *Older & Upper*, was released featuring another six tracks – *Fastlove (Part II)*, *Spinning The Wheel (Forthright Mix)*, *Star People '97* and *The Strangest Thing '97* alongside *You Know That I Want To* and *Safe*.

Older is an album of sadness, joy, carefree inconsequential abandon and regret. It's basically all the themes that George had explored so well since he first rocked up on *Top Of The Pops* as a last-minute replacement for Shaky in 1982. He had a way of managing to tap into the universal and everyday thrills and tragedies of us all. It was his masterpiece.

As George said in the *Red Line* interview: "I'm very proud of *Listen Without Prejudice*. But I think the whole experience of losing Anselmo; the period of grief, which was roughly two years that I didn't write a note of music. And then, the absolute knowledge that the next album I was going to write would be about grief and recovery. *Older* is my greatest moment. And as I've said before I don't ever want to be that inspired again."



21st Century Sparks collection

BMG marks the Mael brothers' creative renaissance with a collection of deluxe reissues

With their recent film musical *Annette* picking up countless awards and an Edgar Wright-directed documentary also winning widespread plaudits, Sparks' critical and commercial stock has never been higher.

Now BMG are celebrating their work in the new millennium with *21st Century Sparks*, a collection of newly remastered deluxe reissues on CD and vinyl that covers the duo's releases between 2000-2009.

The first instalment on 29 April, comprises the transitional *Balls* from 2000, its minimalist/maximalist masterpiece follow-up two years later, *Lil' Beethoven*, and the operatic rock monster, 2006's *Hello Young Lovers*. The second wave, on 27 May, completes the set of reissues with *Exotic Creatures Of The Deep* from 2008 and ambitious radio musical, 2009's *The Seduction Of Ingmar Bergman*. The inclusion of bonus material on the CD and digital versions – excluding *The Seduction Of Ingmar Bergman* – much of it previously unreleased, makes these essential purchases for new and old fans alike. Sparks' *Hippopotamus* and *A Steady Drip, Drip, Drip* albums are also available.

Since their pioneering collaboration with Giorgio Moroder on 1979's *No.1 In Heaven*, Sparks had never strayed too far from the orbit of electronic dance music. On 2000's *Balls*, they fully engaged with it once more with tracks touching on the dynamics of rave – Prodigy-style crunching breakbeats butted heads with customary Mael brothers mischief.

Typically ambitious, Ron and Russell followed it with the concept album *Lil' Beethoven*, its central conceit was to imagine what the legendary composer might create if he were reincarnated in the early 21st century with access to modern technology. The Mael brothers' answer to this thought experiment was a neo-classical LP which brought traditional orchestration – elegant flurries of strings and pianos – together with looped phrases, hypnotic repetition, samples and multi-tracked layers of operatic vocals to create a 21st century symphony.

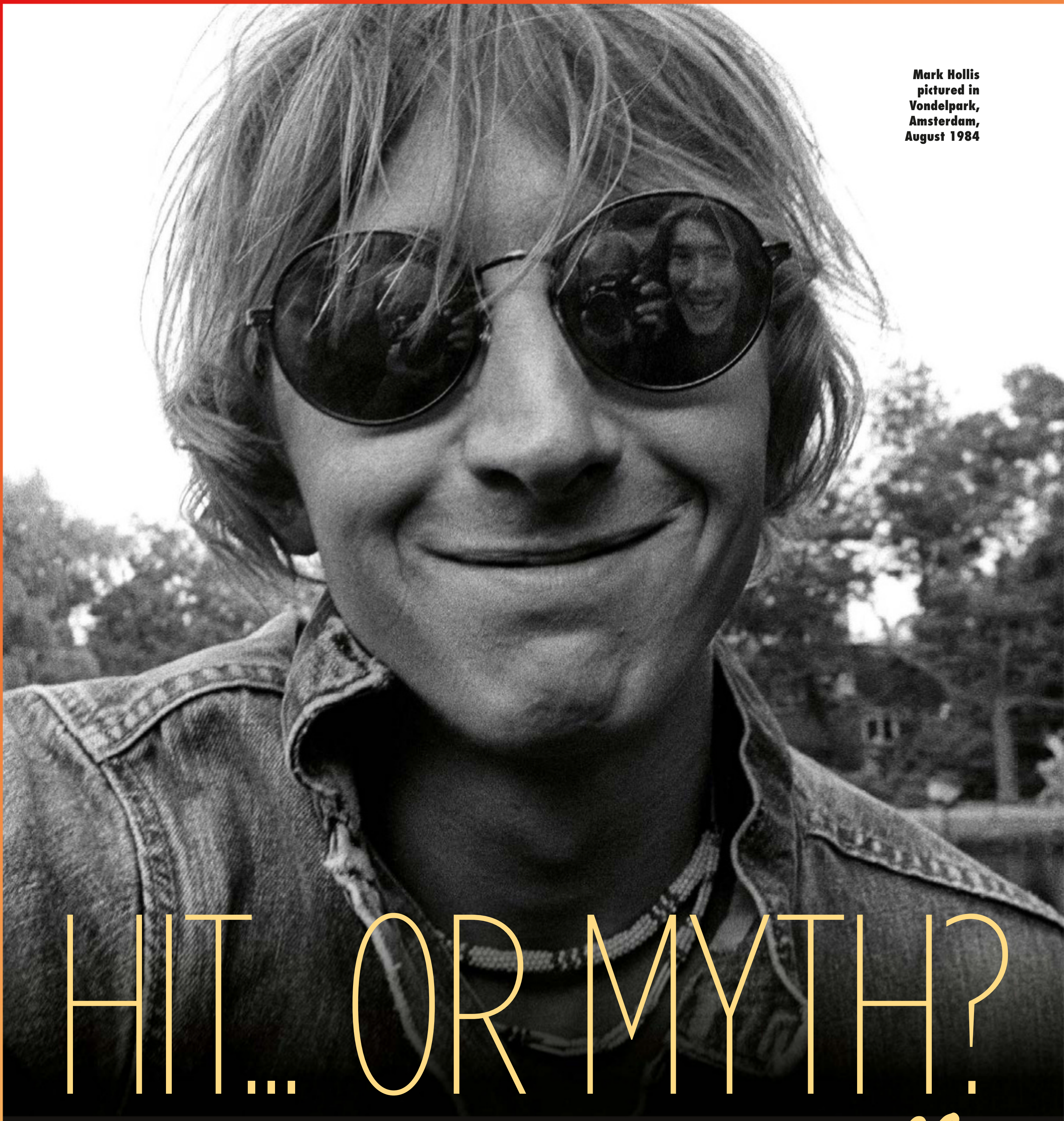
2006's *Hello Young Lovers* – the duo's 20th album – built further on Sparks' 21st century hot streak. Where *Lil' Beethoven* was minimalist, *Hello Young Lovers* – two years in the making – went in entirely the opposite sonic direction. A concept LP of sorts, with every song relating in some way to the subject of love and relationships in the modern world, it was signposted by its suggestive artwork of several dozen white rabbits crammed tightly together.

Exotic Creatures Of The Deep, Sparks' fourth studio album in eight years, was a new high point in their renaissance. Recorded at their own Sparks Studios in Los Angeles, all the long-established Sparksian tropes were in place including falsetto choirs of multiple Russells to Ron's intricate, hectic arrangements, with Tammy Glover's timpani adding gravitas to the endeavour. The electroclash-flavoured *I Can't Believe That You Would Fall For All The Crap In This Song* managed to deconstruct the pop song itself while *She Got Me Pregnant* employed a typical Ron Mael reversal of expected norms. *Good Morning*, the first Sparks track to appear on iTunes when it was released as a single, was a dialogue with God through the hungover fog of the morning after a one-night stand.

In 2009, the duo rounded off one of the most creatively fruitful decades of their career with *The Seduction Of Ingmar Bergman*, a radio musical that explored a fictional narrative involving the Swedish art-house movie maestro. The recording, featured a cast of actor-singers augmenting Russell's vocals plus an orchestra backing Ron's pianos.

If there's a hole in the knowledge of any Sparks newcomers, or even long-term admirers, it might be this crucial period in the 2000s, between their first flushes of fame and current success, when the duo rediscovered their muse and released some of their finest studio albums. The 21st Century Sparks collection fills that gap admirably.

www.allsparks.com



Mark Hollis pictured in Vondelpark, Amsterdam, August 1984

HIT... OR MYTH?

The Legends Of Mark Hollis

BETWEEN 1998's SOLO ALBUM AND HIS DEATH IN 2019, TALK TALK SINGER MARK HOLLIS RETREATED INTO A RECLUSIVE, ENIGMATIC SILENCE. AIDED BY A NEW BOOK AND A DOCUMENTARY, WE EXPLORE THE STORY BEHIND THE SUNGLASSES...

WYNDHAM WALLACE

© Getty

Talk Talk in 1984, the year they released second album *It's My Life*

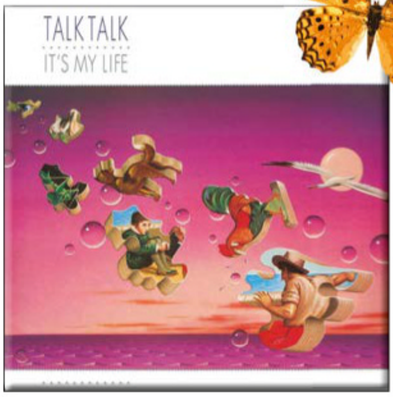
© Alamy

When Talk Talk mastermind Mark Hollis died, aged 64, in 2019, the outpouring of grief was so great that, while it didn't match the mourning provoked by Davie Bowie's or Prince's passing in 2016, it nonetheless came close. Dismissed early on as lightweights, Talk Talk and Hollis had come to be recognised as among the most influential acts to emerge from their era, with initial pop nous admired by the likes of No Doubt, who had a huge hit with a cover of *It's My Life* in 2003, and later, sophisticated work championed by Elbow's Guy Garvey, Underworld's Karl Hyde, Bon Iver's Justin Vernon and Robert Plant.

That people could feel so bereft was, to some, unexpected. It's now more than 30 years since Talk Talk's final album, 1991's *Laughing Stock*, and next year it will be a quarter of a century since 1998's *Mark Hollis*, his lone solo LP, while none of his recordings has grazed a Top 40 chart since 1990's *Natural History: The Very Best Of Talk Talk*. Furthermore, aside from a handful of collaborations – the last in 2001 on Norwegian-Polish singer-songwriter Anja Garbarek's beguiling *Smiling & Waving* – Hollis' only music since 1998 is less than a minute long: a quasi-baroque instrumental, *ARB Section 1*, from a 2012 episode of Kelsey Grammar's poorly performing TV show, *Boss*. Beyond that, he maintained a watertight public silence. One could be excused for not knowing who Hollis was.

If the fact he'd not been largely forgotten was surprising, fans discovering their passion was widely shared enjoyed a bigger revelation. There were, doubtless, countless people who still loved his band's first two, often maudlin synth-pop albums, 1982's *The Party's Over* and 1984's *It's My Life* – home to hits like *Today*, *It's My Life*, *Such A Shame* and *Dum Dum Girl* – not to mention 1986's more analogue *The Colour Of Spring*, which delivered even more classics like *Life's What You Make It* and *Living In Another World*. But 1988's *Spirit Of Eden*, as well as the similarly commercially ill-fated *Laughing Stock* and *Mark Hollis*, appeared most lauded, and these, in contrast, are best heard with the lights down, when the beauty, comfort and redemption they offer are most affecting. More importantly, one listens to them *alone*, making this a private, even intimate relationship. In the wake of Hollis' passing, it appeared there was an entire community of like-minded souls whose lives they had touched in an uncommonly profound manner. Suddenly, it transpired we'd never been alone at all.

DISMISSED EARLY ON AS LIGHTWEIGHTS, TALK TALK AND HOLLIS HAD COME TO BE RECOGNISED AS AMONG THE MOST INFLUENTIAL ACTS TO EMERGE FROM THEIR ERA



THE SOUND OF SILENCE

In the silence Hollis left behind, devotion to his achievements has grown. He gave his last interviews around his eponymous album, and Paul 'Rustin Man' Webb (bass), Lee Harris (drums) and Tim Friese-Greene (sometime producer and multi-disciplined, unofficial Talk Talk band member) have also refused to discuss their work together ever

since, apparently out of respect. "I would rather just have the album say what it is itself and not do anything for it," Hollis told *International Musician And Recording World*'s Andrew Smith on the eve of *Spirit Of Eden*'s release. Ten years later he extended his fondness for reticence further, telling Danish TV: "I get on great with silence. I don't have a problem with it. It's just silent, y'know. So it's kind of like, well, if you're going to break into it, just try and have a reason for doing it."

This was a practice at first applied only, albeit increasingly, to his songs. Nevertheless, it reflected later life choices, and his closest collaborators adopted it, too. As Martin Ditcham, who worked on and off with Hollis from *The Colour Of Spring* until the solo LP, reiterates, "Mark would certainly have endorsed that now hackneyed

> "I WOULD RATHER HEAR ONE NOTE THAN I WOULD TWO, AND I WOULD RATHER HEAR SILENCE THAN I WOULD ONE NOTE" MARK HOLLIS

expression, 'Let the music speak for itself'." But if studio engineer Phill Brown, who worked on Hollis' last three albums, politely considers his refusal to talk as "a 'fuck you' to the fans", an opinion expressed in Gwenaël Breës' Talk Talk documentary *In A Silent Way*, the tactic has worked. Even Ditcham confesses of *Spirit Of Eden*: "It certainly didn't excite me on first listening. I thought it was so marginal, so exceptional and so inaccessible that, although I eventually grew to love it, I was astonished it got released." And yet the less Hollis said, the more his disciples fantasised, with a subsequently enviable word of mouth campaign helping him reach an audience far greater than those records' immediate reception could have anticipated.

For over two decades, fans have speculated about the manifold inconsistencies at the heart of Hollis' catalogue, and an almost unprecedented, unrivalled mythology has flourished, with chart-friendly years seemingly incompatible with the complex, commercially doomed style with which he quietly bowed out. So why did a band considered pretenders to Duran Duran's throne end up spurning the spotlight? What led Hollis to reject fame in favour of music so esoteric and fastidious? And is Creation Records founder Alan McGee's claim that Hollis' is a "story of one man against the system in a bid to maintain creative control" accurate, or is his actually a tale of artistic indulgence, summarised in unusually candid fashion by former manager Keith Aspden's remark in 2011 that "Mark had his cake and ate it all himself"? It's unlikely we'll ever know. Like Ditcham says: "Unanswered mysteries always have legs!"

Few artists succeed in making such sharp left turns – from articulate, refined pop to something almost metaphysical – so it makes sense people want to know more. Fortunately, this Spring brings two contrasting attempts to unravel such mysteries. Ben Wardle's *Mark Hollis: A Perfect Silence* is the first full-length biography about the reclusive figure, while Breës' aforementioned documentary explores the Belgian director's relationship with Hollis' records – he calls later ones "life companions" – as well as their making. Perhaps inevitably, both provoke as many questions as they offer answers, and it's notable their apt titles come in part from what appears to have been Hollis' central creed, expressed – yet again – in an interview with John Pidgeon around *Laughing Stock*: "I would rather hear one note than I would two, and I would rather hear silence than I would one note."

Talking to Wardle, it's clear that resolving the contradictions of Hollis' life was quite a task. "Don't get me started," he laughs, before summing them up succinctly. "Hollis was an acetic, loner genius who loved pubs, swearing, fast cars and golf. The number of times I had to think of synonyms for 'dichotomy'!"

Breës, meanwhile, faced an even greater challenge. "Hollis heard about my project before I even contacted him,"

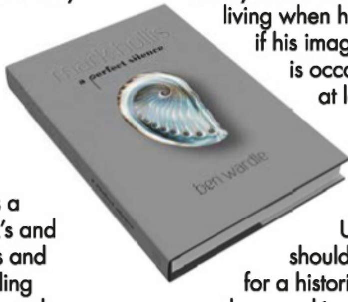
Talk Talk in 1982. From left to right: Simon Brenner, Mark Hollis, Lee Harris, Paul Webb

MARK HOLLIS: A PERFECT SILENCE
BEN WARDLE

ROCKET 88

★★★★

It's no mean feat to write a book when its protagonists have refused to discuss their work. As a former A&R, though, Wardle knows how the industry ticks, and also has the address book to compensate for any 'missing pieces' (to borrow a Talk Talk rarities compilation's title). Consequently, *A Perfect Silence* provides a deep dive into Talk Talk's and Mark Hollis' movements and motivations, with recording practises, touring habits and occasionally questionable characters – not to mention a revolving cast of bit players – explored in forensic detail.



Taking us from Hollis' Tottenham birth and suburban Southend childhood, Wardle begins with his solid family upbringing in post-war Britain, then guides us all the way to the stylish house in which he was living when he passed away, and if his image as a saintly genius is occasionally threatened, at least Wardle's enthusiasm for Hollis' music makes it easier to separate art from the artist. Ultimately, the book should satisfy those looking for a historical document as well as those seeking greater insight into his challenging, at times peculiar techniques, and, furthermore, it leaves enough of his inscrutability intact to safeguard Hollis' ongoing, influential legacy. **Wyndham Wallace**

© Getty

he explains. "I received a letter from his lawyer firmly forbidding me to use his music and asking me to abandon my project. I then wrote to Hollis personally so that he would understand what was driving me, that I was interested in the music, the approach, the spirit, not in his personality or his private life, not in making a biopic. He replied very kindly, but asked me to respect his position: *'I would be wholly against a film being made in connection to these albums, since I prefer that they be allowed to stand alone and exist in their own right.'*"

Fans need not despair. Without compromising Hollis' wishes, Wardle and Breës have trawled the archives and tracked down other collaborators and

Talk Talk perform in Germany, 1984

© Alamy

associates, shedding light on how this music came into existence as well as the personalities behind it. Moreover, despite Hollis' convictions, our understanding of his recordings and performances is only enhanced by details of its provenance, and their magic is powerful enough to resist distractions. The picture which emerges is, admittedly, occasionally uncomfortable, but the truth was always in plain sight if only the myths had cleared. "Having worked with a number of artists in my former life as an A&R person," Wardle pithily points out, "my experience is that most of them have teeth when it comes to their music. You simply don't sustain a career by being nice to everyone. Unless you're Dave Grohl, anyway."

Talk Talk – and, in particular, Hollis – were always enigmatic figures, not least for what Depeche Mode's Alan Wilder once called "a career in reverse", with the distinct schism between the band's first hit albums and final neglected two bridged by *The Colour Of Spring*'s international accomplishments. As Wardle writes: "To German, Italian, Spanish or Dutch fiftysomething music fans, [Hollis] is an 80s superstar – a Boy George or a George Michael; to younger musicians, journalists and music obsessives all over the world, he is a visionary akin to Scott Walker, Nick Drake or Syd Barrett."

No wonder, really. Hollis was schooled as a 70s youth in an extraordinary range of music by his erudite brother, Ed – manager of Canvey Island pub-rockers Eddie & The Hot Rods – and his recordings with his first band, The Reaction, also managed by Hollis Sr, reveal a man well versed in punk and new wave. An early *Mirror Man* – later reworked for *The Party's Over* – boasts a reggae feel worthy of The Police, *I Can't Resist* sounds almost like Elvis Costello, while *Talk Talk Talk Talk*, later reinvented as his band's signature tune, could pass for Dr Feelgood. Still, after Hollis had met keyboardist Simon Brenner, Webb and Harris – the latter two joining from ska band Eskalator, who'd caught Ed's ear while he produced their demo – Talk Talk launched themselves in spotless white suits with songs that arguably sat comfortably under the New Romantic banner.

Hollis, however, further muddied the water by punctuating interviews with seemingly bizarre references to King Crimson, John Coltrane, Shostakovich and Debussy, all of whose influence was practically invisible. The press were baffled, sometimes aggressively negative, and Hollis' attitude didn't help. During media engagements he refused questions about his private life and was as likely to be sarcastic as sincere, while he sometimes dismissed innocent if admittedly superficial questions with cryptic, even barbed responses. "Talk Talk," wrote critic Richard Walmsey in *International Musician And Recording World* in 1986, "are a remarkable example of the thin borderline between genius and sheer cretinism."

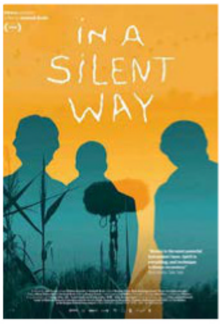
As for that pivotal third album, Hollis declared it only came about because he had a bigger budget. Previously, he claimed, electronic instruments were employed purely because he couldn't afford real musicians, but with *It's My Life* producer Tim Friese-Greene established as his co-writer and Brenner gone, he now adopted a defiantly organic sound, populated by contributions from the renowned

IN A SILENT WAY
DIR. GWENAËL BREËS

DÉRVIVES PRODUCTIONS / SAVAGE FILM

★★★★

It's clear from its start that Breës' debut isn't going to be a typical documentary. Opening with former associates and allied critics reading a letter from Hollis' legal team distancing him from the project, *In A Silent Way* instead becomes an oddly compelling meditation on creativity, what we seek in music, and how we listen to it. Consciously lo-fi, it sees Breës unstitching some of the myths behind the band's transformation and transformative recordings, with talking heads ranging from youthful acquaintances like Eddie & The Hot Rods' singer Barrie Masters, who recalls Hollis' work as a roadie, to musicians, engineers and even random strangers, including, bizarrely, Frank Bruno's former sparring partner. Breës makes pilgrimages to Southend, Canvey Island and Wessex Studios and even considers ringing Hollis' doorbell, while a group of musicians, adopting Hollis' techniques, provide an improvised post-rock soundtrack. (Talk Talk would admittedly have been preferable.) Consequently, what starts as a quest for the truth behind some of the greatest records ever made ends up – as so often – bent to Hollis' will, provoking a less accessible but ultimately more inventive film which ultimately remains in thrall to the power of the enigma. Hollis, one suspects, would have approved. **WW**



likes of Traffic's Steve Winwood, The Pretenders' Robbie McIntosh and Pentangle's Danny Thompson. Afterwards, in another confounding display of artistic idiosyncrasy, having secured worldwide hits and wowed audiences with an enviably tight band, Hollis turned his back on performance, making only occasional, awkward promotional appearances.

Instead, he surrendered two years to Wessex Studios, where, with Webb largely sidelined, the uncompromising *Spirit Of Eden* and then, a couple of years later, *Laughing Stock* were improvised and recorded. It's these which are arguably most responsible for the utopian visions of artistic freedom orbiting Hollis. Meticulously pieced together, commercially doomed but artistically triumphant, *Spirit Of Eden* alone involved some 50 guest musicians given little guidance nor any opportunity to prepare for their contributions, their work sometimes employed, if at all, in different contexts. "Once we spent five 12-hour days getting a guitar sound," Brown told me in 2013. "It was an extremely unusual way to work."

He's not exaggerating. "In my case, a process of elimination was put into play," Ditcham recalls. "They wouldn't let me hear the music. I'd do two or three tracks of various percussive ideas, then later they'd cherry-pick what they liked." He also recalls a studio environment inspired by stories Brown had told Hollis about working with Traffic in 1967. "Flashing strobe lights under a semi-transparent bucket," he lists, "and cheap, flashing disco lights in front of Lee's drums. In the control room all the lights were off except for a 60s rotating projector loaded with an oil-filled slide shining colourful, slowly evolving, psychedelic patterns. It was certainly a very mysterious atmosphere."

THE EDEN PROJECT

While *Spirit Of Eden* was said to be loathed by the label who'd paid for it and largely scorned by critics – neither rumour's entirely true, but legends are always popular – Hollis and his associates would do it all again, having jumped ship from EMI to Polydor after a protracted court case, for *Laughing Stock*. "I know the album feels like seven guys playing live in a room, but every note is 'placed' where it is," Brown told me, recalling Hollis' quest for perfection. "The album is an illusion!" Both it and *Spirit Of Eden* are, of course, now deemed pinnacles of artistic achievement which put music beyond any other consideration, but it's not that this came without pain. "It took its toll on

Hollis took studio perfectionism to new heights during Talk Talk's later career

people but gave great results," Brown continued. "There was divorce, breakdown, it was intense. I have never worked on more focused sessions, though. And no, I would not work in the dark again." That Hollis concluded his career with a painstakingly arranged solo album of pseudo-chamber music recorded purely with acoustic instruments – the polar opposite of Talk Talk's first work – makes sense in the light of this endlessly unpredictable career.

It's probably Hollis' 'difficult' nature that's the most consequential aspect of this year's retrospectives. Hollis, Wardle reminds us, could exercise a distinctly 'laddish' character, and his pursuit of his goals sometimes showed little regard for those upon whom he depended for their realisation. Touring was such a struggle he turned to alcohol and pranks to survive, and Clive Black – now an industry veteran, but then an Island Records junior who helped sign him to a songwriter deal – recalls how INXS' Garry Gary Beers was once lured into Talk Talk's dressing room on his way to a festival stage only to be blinded by an eyeful of gin thrown by the band. In Breës' documentary, meanwhile, Ian Curnow recalls having his fingers tied together and being forced to play keyboards for hours in considerable discomfort, and it's clear that, though this

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indignity is usually cast as ingenious by Hollis' fans, the memory is far from welcome, and that this fate's sometimes attributed to Nigel Kennedy instead probably hasn't helped. There are, too, more than a few hints of bitterness from those who feel their contributions were undervalued, especially those who believe they were due songwriting cuts – "[Manager] Keith and Mark are both ruthless," Brown told me – and one can't help wondering whether the silence around Hollis has roots in people's determination not to get involved in debates about his demeanour.

> "ONCE WE SPENT FIVE 12-HOUR DAYS GETTING A GUITAR SOUND. IT WAS AN EXTREMELY UNUSUAL WAY TO WORK."
>
> PHILL BROWN

For all this, there are plenty of accolades for both his music and personality. "It's true there were occasions when he could be a bully," Wardle says. "Lee Harris was repeatedly asked to replay a drum part during the record of *Laughing Stock* without any explanation as to what he was doing wrong. But there were an equal number of occasions where interviewees told me how lovely Hollis was. Harmonica player Mark Feltham, guitarist Robbie McIntosh and pianist Laurence Pendrous all recounted in detail how enjoyable his company was." Ditcham, too, says he "never witnessed any difficult or uncomfortable situations," adding "his approach certainly got the best out of a musician."

Wardle also points to Phil Ramacon, whose multiple experiences working with Hollis epitomised its pitfalls and pleasures. "He told me how much he enjoyed his company, how Hollis bought him clothes for their shows and would regularly make him cheese on toast in his flat before they went to rehearsals together. But he also told me how he had helped Hollis assemble and write *Such A Shame* from fragments of cassette ideas. He was refused a publishing credit and ultimately felt he could no longer face playing with Talk Talk because he felt so exploited. That said, he liked Hollis enough to work with him again on the solo album, albeit after having insisted on getting a co-writing credit!"

In the end, the mysteries remain. Hollis willingly disappeared, leaving his music to do the talking, and though we now know a lot more, its mystique remains unblemished. If his methods were occasionally disagreeable – and, let's be honest, they *were* – his artistry, not to mention his unforgettable hits, will outlast them. As Wardle concludes: "Anyone who pursues his own vision against the prevailing wind of opinion and fashion, and creates something which grows in stature as each year passes, is a genius." That Hollis rests in peace so prematurely is tragic, but peace was always what he sought most. It remains his greatest gift. ■

● *A Perfect Silence* by Ben Wardle is published by Rocket 88 – for more details visit markhollisbook.com. For further information about Gwenaël Breës' documentary, visit inasilentway.org

Mark Hollis in 1990, a year before Talk Talk formally split

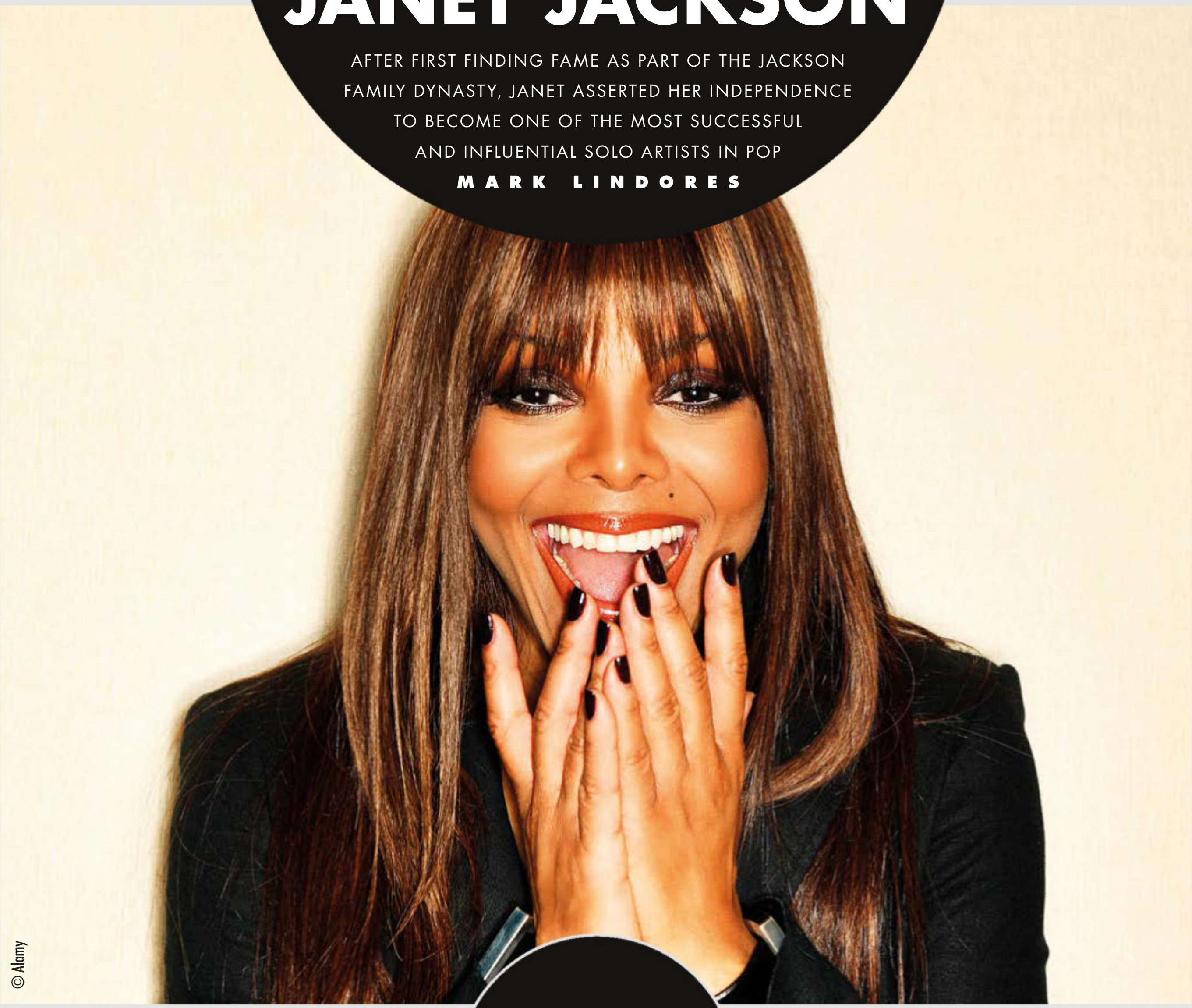
© Getty

ALBUM BY ALBUM

JANET JACKSON

AFTER FIRST FINDING FAME AS PART OF THE JACKSON FAMILY DYNASTY, JANET ASSERTED HER INDEPENDENCE TO BECOME ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL AND INFLUENTIAL SOLO ARTISTS IN POP

MARK LINDORES



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JANET'S MINIMAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE RECORD PROVES TO BE ITS GREATEST WEAKNESS

Despite being just 16 years old when she released her self-titled debut album in 1982, Janet Jackson already had close to a decade of performance experience under her belt thanks to regular appearances at her brothers' Las Vegas revue and acting roles on US TV shows such as *Good Times* and *Diff'rent Strokes*. She initially had no desire to enter the family firm, planning instead to go to college to study business law. However, those aspirations were swiftly vetoed by her strict disciplinarian father/manager Joe, who, having masterminded her brothers' ascent to pop's most successful dynasty, secured her a contract with A&M Records.

Trepidatious about how she wanted to present herself, Janet expressed a desire to be regarded as her own entity and was rather reluctant to have her surname on the record. Joe and A&M overruled her, however, seeing the Jackson name as a selling point and assembled a team of the R&B scene's most promising talent to build the album around her.

Side One of the LP was written and produced by René Moore and Angela Winbush, a couple who'd written, produced, arranged and played on their own hits as well as those songs crafted specifically for Janet. Meanwhile, Side Two was helmed largely by Foster Sylvers from LA-based R&B family group The Sylvers with producer Bobby Watson completing the team. With success and experience between them, Janet's only required input was to turn up and sing, a commitment that she slotted in between her studies and acting work.

Janet's minimal contribution to the record proves to be its greatest weakness. It lacks personality, sticking largely to the identikit pop and R&B of the time with her vocals elevating much of the unremarkable material. Standouts are the funky opener *Say You Do*, a track that owes a large debt to Michael's *Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough*, the infectious, string-laden *You'll Never Find (A Love Like Mine)* which harks back to Philly soul, and *Come Give Your Love To Me*, which refreshingly incorporates guitars and new wave synths into the mix.

Released in September 1982, *Janet Jackson* peaked at a disappointing No.63 in the US and failed to produce a hit single. Despite Janet's attempts to push the album by performing on shows such as *American Bandstand* and *Soul Train*, it was eclipsed by the release of the behemoth that was Michael's *Thriller* two months later.

JANET JACKSON
Released 1982
Label A&M
Chart Positions
US No.63 UK –

As statements of independence go, few are as direct as the title track of *Control*. Although her third album, it serves as the world's real introduction to Janet, given it truly was the record on which she found her voice. After two unsuccessful albums which bore just her name and vocals, Janet took hold of the reins of her career by firing her father as manager. She then sought the guidance of A&M's John McClain, who teamed her with former Prince cohorts Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis.

The failure of her previous album, *Dream Street*, had coincided with a turbulent time in Janet's personal life, during which she had eloped with James DeBarge – singer with rival family group DeBarge – only to discover his voracious drug habit. Realising her mistake, she swiftly annulled the marriage and returned to the sheltered security of the Jackson estate.

Unfulfilled in life and in her career, Janet reluctantly agreed to a temporary make-or-break move to Minneapolis to record her next album after Jam & Lewis refused to work in California.

THE FAILURE OF HER PREVIOUS ALBUM HAD COINCIDED WITH A TURBULENT TIME IN JANET'S PERSONAL LIFE

Holed up in the production duo's Flyte Tyme Studios, Janet, Jimmy and Terry quickly established a bond which transformed the trajectories of their careers, cultivating a unique sound which comprised rap, R&B, funk and pop (later termed New Jack Swing) and utilised cutting-edge technology to create an innovative art of noise. Teaming their ground-breaking sonics with Janet's declarations of independence, control and respect, *Control* was undeniably a landmark record.

Now 36 years later, it manages to sound gloriously retro and futuristic concurrently. The crunching beats and percussive tics of *Nasty* berate the guys that had tried to intimidate her in Minneapolis, while the irresistibly funky *What Have You Done For Me Lately* updates Aretha's demand for R-E-S-P-E-C-T. *When I Think Of You*, with its euphoric stabs of brass capturing the giddy heights of love, the chaotic euphoria of *The Pleasure Principle* and tender ballad *Let's Wait Awhile* maintain a standard so high that seven of the album's nine tracks justifiably went on to become hit singles.

Self-assured, sassy and streetwise, *Control* sold over 10 million copies worldwide.

CONTROL
Released 1986
Label A&M
Chart Positions
US No.1 UK No.8

As is always the case when something becomes popular, pressure mounts to replicate that success and with *Control's* impressive stats, A&M had a strong case for wanting Janet to continue in the same milieu for its follow-up. However, feeling she had covered those themes, Janet eschewed their instructions for a carbon copy sequel and instead chose to tackle more expansive issues.

Inspired by channel surfing during studio downtime and feeling deflated by the constant stream of negativity in the news (sound familiar?), Janet, Jimmy and Terry came up with the concept of a modern-day take on the social commentary of Marvin Gaye's soul classic *What's Going On*.

Prompting unification through music, Janet created a movement with a manifesto to highlight the world's ills – including racism, poverty, illiteracy and prejudice. The album was conceived as an immersive experience rather than a straightforward collection of tracks, beginning with a pledge and featuring between-song interludes to weave the material together.

Opening with a suite of songs that brought a strong socially conscious message – the Sly & The Family Stone-sampling title track, the slick swingbeat of *State Of The World* and sparse, industrial feel of *The Knowledge*, the mood of the album switches up with an interlude asking, "Get the point? Good, let's dance!", before giving way to a string of punchy dance tracks – all of which added to Janet's impressive tally of US Top 5 hits, *Miss You Much*, *Escapade* and *Alright*, yearning ballad *Come Back To Me*, and the hard rock of *Black Cat*.

PROMPTING UNIFICATION THROUGH MUSIC, JANET CREATED A MOVEMENT WITH A MANIFESTO TO HIGHLIGHT THE WORLD'S ILLS

Although *Rhythm Nation* is deeply entrenched in its harsh black and white imagery and the iconic video for the title track, featuring Janet and her troupe of dancers delivering ground-breaking choreography in black military-inspired jumpsuits and baseball caps, as a body of work, the album's severity is countered by many lighter moments. The highlight of which is the sparkling sensuality of *Love Will Never Do (Without You)*, a seductive delight that served as the perfect teaser for where Janet headed next.

RHYTHM NATION 1814
Released 1989
Label A&M
Chart Positions
US No.1 UK No.4

Not too dissimilar from the framework of her debut, *Dream Street's* bid for crossover appeal, which trades the R&B foundations of its predecessor for a broader pop sound, comes across as contrived. Boasting a mixed bag of collaborators including Janet's brother Marlon, Giorgio Moroder and even Cliff Richard (yes, really), *Dream Street* suffers from a lack of direction.

As was the case with her debut, Janet's role began and ended with contributing vocals, with her recording sessions scheduled around her role in the *Fame* TV series.

Highlights are scarce though the Moroder-produced title track and the Marlon Jackson-navigated *Don't Stand Another Chance* at least hint at the potential of what was to come.

Fast Girls desperately wants to sound like Prince protégés Vanity 6 (it fails), while *Pretty Boy*, although equally unremarkable, is significant in the big picture as it is written and produced by The Time's Jesse Johnson.

Faring significantly worse than Janet's debut, *Dream Street's* failure marked a significant turning point in that it prompted the realisation that if Janet was to pursue music seriously, it would have to be on her own terms and she would have to make some significant changes – however difficult that would be.

DREAM STREET
Released 1984
Label A&M
Chart Positions
US No.147 UK –

A lot had changed in the four years since Janet's previous studio album. She had signed a deal with Virgin worth an estimated $40 million, making her the highest paid artist in the world, scored one of her biggest hits with *The Best Things In Life Are Free* with Luther Vandross, and shot her debut film, gritty romantic drama *Poetic Justice*. Unbeknownst to the world at the time, she had also married her boyfriend, René Elizondo Jr. The combination of the latter two ignited the confidence and sexual liberty that informs 1993's *janet.*

The laidback groove of *That's The Way Love Goes*, which effortlessly eased Janet back into the spotlight after a lengthy break, was the perfect reintroduction, topping the US chart for eight weeks. Elsewhere, the album draws from a diverse range of influences with alt-rock (*What'll I Do*) nestling comfortably next to operatic melodrama (*This Time*). *You Want This* and *Because Of Love* are both hip-hop-flavoured dance tracks, *Throb* is a pulsating house anthem and ballads *Where Are You Now* and *Again* are beautiful in their simplicity – the latter of which earned Janet an Oscar nomination due to its inclusion in *Poetic Justice*.

JANET'S NEWFOUND CONFIDENCE AND SEXUAL LIBERATION WAS REFLECTED IN THE ALBUM'S ARTWORK

Rhythm Nation's social commentary is revisited briefly on *New Agenda*, which includes a rap from Public Enemy's Chuck D, while the sensual *The Body That Loves You* and *Any Time, Any Place* are tailor-made for Janet's fans who had confessed to playing her music while having sex, leading her to dub them her "baby-making songs". Hidden track, *Whoops Now*, a Motown-flavoured breezy effort was one the album's biggest hits in the UK, while the high-octane sexplicit masterpiece *If* provides the album's highlight.

Janet's newfound confidence and sexual liberation were reflected in the album's artwork, particularly the cover, shot by Patrick Demarchelier. Deemed too risqué by the record label, who cropped the image to focus solely on her face, the full-length version, featuring a topless Jackson gazing confidently while a pair of male hands (later revealed to be her husband René's) cup her bare breasts, became one of the most iconic pop images of the decade.

JANET.
Released 1993
Label Virgin
Chart Positions
US No.1 UK No.1

Having completed a hugely successful tour, renegotiated her record contract to $80 million, establishing her again as the highest paid artist in music history (at the time), and released her first greatest hits compilation, *Design Of A Decade*, Janet should have been feeling on top of the world. In fact, she'd hit rock bottom, suffering what she later realised was an emotional breakdown.

Backstage on the tour, the singer was unable to emerge from deep sadness and depression. Despite her status as one of the world's leading sex symbols, she was plagued by body dysmorphia. Rather than enjoying her wealth and success, she constantly felt worthless and inadequate, prompting psychotherapy that delved as far back as childhood to come to terms with her feelings. Understanding that other people must be sharing her insecurities, Janet poured her findings into her most personal LP.

DESPITE HER STATUS AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S LEADING SEX SYMBOLS, JANET WAS PLAGUED BY BODY DYSMORPHIA

Encompassing hip-hop, R&B, jazz, trip-hop, dance and electro, *The Velvet Rope* covers a myriad of subjects from the scathing self-analysis of *You*, the self-affirming *Special* and vitriolic *What About*, which tackles the horrors of domestic violence while *Empty* predicts the hollowness of social media. *Go Deep*, despite the title, has nothing to do with therapy, and is the album's most feelgood moment along with *Together Again*, an uplifting homage to Janet's friends lost to AIDS.

Sexuality is also a central theme of much of the record, be it subtle (a cover of Rod Stewart's *Tonight's The Night* maintains the gender of the original and is sung to a woman), blatant (*Rope Burn* which is an ode to sado-masochism) or righteous (*Free Xone* denounces homophobia). Other high points include the sleek Joni Mitchell-sampling *Got 'Til It's Gone*, the synth-infused swingbeat of the title track and sublime R&B balladry of *I Get Lonely*.

Although it didn't sell as well as its predecessors – though eight million copies is an impressive result – *The Velvet Rope* is in many respects Janet's masterpiece and its influence on sub-genres including neo-soul and alt-R&B is undeniable.

THE VELVET ROPE
Released 1997
Label Virgin
Chart Positions
US No.1 UK No.6

Having offloaded some emotional baggage on *The Velvet Rope* and divorced her secret husband of nine years, René, the new millennium saw Janet in a positive frame of mind. She was excited to be single and dating for the first time, something she wanted to reflect in the fun, carefree stylings of 2001's *All For You*.

This forward-looking optimism informs a suite of feelgood songs which are the beating heart of the album, including the title track, America-sampling *Someone To Call My Lover*, house-inflected *Come On Get Up* and *Doesn't Really Matter*.

Things take a darker turn and deceit and betrayal are explored on the synthesised swagger of *You Ain't Right*, the vitriolic *Son Of A Gun (I Betcha Think This Song Is About You)*, the sublime rocky, hip-hopera *Trust A Try*, before the mellow drum'n'bass of *Better Days* concludes the album on an optimistic note.

While *All For You* is a solid collection, it's let down by the inclusion of too many bland boudoir ballads and the between-song interludes that enhanced previous records are now rather detrimental to the overal effect.

Nevertheless, despite competition from a generation of artists who followed in her footsteps, Ms Jackson reigned supreme scoring her highest first-week sales and fifth consecutive US No.1 studio album.

ALL FOR YOU
Released 2001
Label Virgin
Chart Positions
US No.1 UK No.2

In a parallel universe, Janet's 2004 Super Bowl Halftime Show went according to plan: the wardrobe malfunction didn't happen and her performance proved to be the meticulously choreographed launch for *Damita Jo* that it was always meant to be, and the singer's eighth album went on to achieve the success it deserved.

Of course, we all know that's not what happened. The ridiculous overreaction to a flash of nipple saw Janet blacklisted by America's major media organisations, thus derailing her career. The fact that Justin Timberlake was held totally unaccountable for his part and saw his career flourish, highlighted America's inherent sexism and racism with Janet solely suffering a backlash which has only dissipated in the last few years.

Released eight weeks after the Super Bowl debacle and unfairly eclipsed upon release, *Damita Jo*, when judged entirely on merit, is a diverse collection of songs, some of which rank among Janet's best.

The horn-filled hip-hop of the title track and *Strawberry Bounce* explain Janet's adoption of different personas in order to feel more liberated (a concept later explored by Beyoncé with her *I Am… Sasha Fierce* album).

The acoustic-flavoured hip-hop of *My Baby* (featuring relative newcomer Kanye West) is charming, as is *Thinking 'Bout My Ex* which contains all the hallmarks of Babyface's classic R&B. Meanwhile, the lilting ballad *Spending Time With You* seguing into the Cathy Dennis co-write *Island Life* transports you to tropical climes.

Elsewhere, *All Nite (Don't Stop)*, with its irresistible hook, is a scorching companion to *Throb* from 1993's *janet.*, *R&B Junkie* is a fun throwback to the 80s, while *I Want You* takes us back even further with its lush production that pastiches classic 60s soul. *Just A Little While*, a new wave-flavoured song with a nod to Prince makes a cute album track but remains a baffling choice for *Damita Jo's* lead single.

THE RIDICULOUS OVERREACTION TO A FLASH OF NIPPLE SAW JANET BLACKLISTED BY AMERICA'S MEDIA

Washed away in a tsunami of controversy, *Damita Jo* marked the beginning of a decline in sales for Janet and was her first studio album since *Dream Street* to miss the top spot in the US albums chart. Underrated and unfairly maligned, it is nevertheless a worthy addition to her canon which houses more than a few hidden gems.

DAMITA JO
Released 2004
Label Virgin
Chart Positions
US No.2 UK No.32

The danger of using a landmark album from your back catalogue to hype up the release of your new record is that as well as creating a buzz, you also risk the danger of sparking expectations that are almost impossible to live up to. Therein lies the main problem with *20 Y.O.* Titled as a reference to the two-decade time-lapse since the release of *Control*, the record was teased as a sequel of sorts to Janet's classic LP, and on that premise, *20 Y.O.* (20 Years Old) falls way short, mainly due to a disparity of the styles on offer.

Hip-hop beats, 80s synths and an abundance of samples permeate much of the first half of the LP with *Do It 2 Me* and the Herbie Hancock-sampling *So Excited* (the album's second single) proving the strongest. However, the quality control takes a substantial leap towards the end when Janet reunites with Jam & Lewis for standouts *Daybreak* (which recaptures the breezy joy of *Escapade*) and the laidback groove of *Enjoy*, while the sensual *Take Care* and *Love 2 Love* are her "baby-making songs" done right.

Unfortunately, a duet with Nelly, *Call On Me*, a weak retread of the rapper's Kelly Rowland collab *Dilemma*, was released as the album's lead single. That decision, along with the continued fallout from the Super Bowl, saw the LP underperform, spelling the end of her 13-year tenure at Virgin.

20 Y.O.
Released 2006
Label Virgin
Chart Positions
US No.2 UK No.63

Having signed to Island Records, Janet chose to revamp her sound, embarking on a project without Jam & Lewis for the first time since 1984's *Dream Street*. Without a single writing credit on the album from Janet, *Discipline* was also the least involved she had been on any of her later records. As is the case with her first two albums, Janet's lack of involvement results in a collection that falls short on personality and could be anyone thanks to its manipulated vocals on many of the tracks. Her weakest collection since her breakthrough, *Discipline* does, however, have a few redeeming qualities. Lead single *Feedback* evokes *Blackout*-era Britney, while the sensual house of *Rock With U* and electro-infused R&B of *2Nite* and *Luv* both make for highlights.

Despite becoming her sixth No.1 album in the US, *Discipline's* sales continued a decline for Janet. After the LP failed to produce any follow-up hits to *Feedback*, the campaign was shelved, prompting Janet and Island to agree to terminate their contract.

DISCIPLINE
Released 2008
Label Island
Chart Positions
US No.1
UK No.63

With countless false starts and abandoned album recording sessions rumoured in the seven years since her previous release, not to mention an apparent focus on acting projects, fans had all but given up on the prospect of a new studio album from Janet. Though she had nothing to prove at this point, 2015's *Unbreakable*, far exceeded expectations.

Her best album since *The Velvet Rope*, *Unbreakable* recreates the undeniable chemistry and magic conjured up by the dream team of Janet, Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. Highlights include dancefloor anthems *Burnitup!* and *Night*, the sensuous R&B of *No Sleeep*, retro-inspired hip-pop via *Dammn Baby* and anthemic power ballad *Well Traveled*. Also impressive was the slick synth-pop of *The Great Forever* and the emotional *Shoulda Known Better*.

Landing her back at the top of the US album charts and greeted with a critical reception which finally gave her work its long overdue credit, *Unbreakable* is a triumph on all counts.

UNBREAKABLE
Released 2015
Label
Rhythm Nation
Chart Positions
US No.1
UK No.11

ALONGSIDE FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD'S WELCOME TO THE PLEASUREDOME, PROPAGANDA'S A SECRET WISH DEFINED THE GRANDEUR OF ZTT. THEIR DEBUT ALBUM STOOD ALONE AS A BEACON OF EXTRAVAGANT SYNTH-POP… UNTIL NOW. MORE THAN THREE DECADES ON, CLAUDIA BRÜCKEN AND SUSANNE FREYTAG TELL THE REMARKABLE STORY OF THEIR STUNNING COMEBACK LP, THE HEART IS STRANGE.

JOHN EARLS

play

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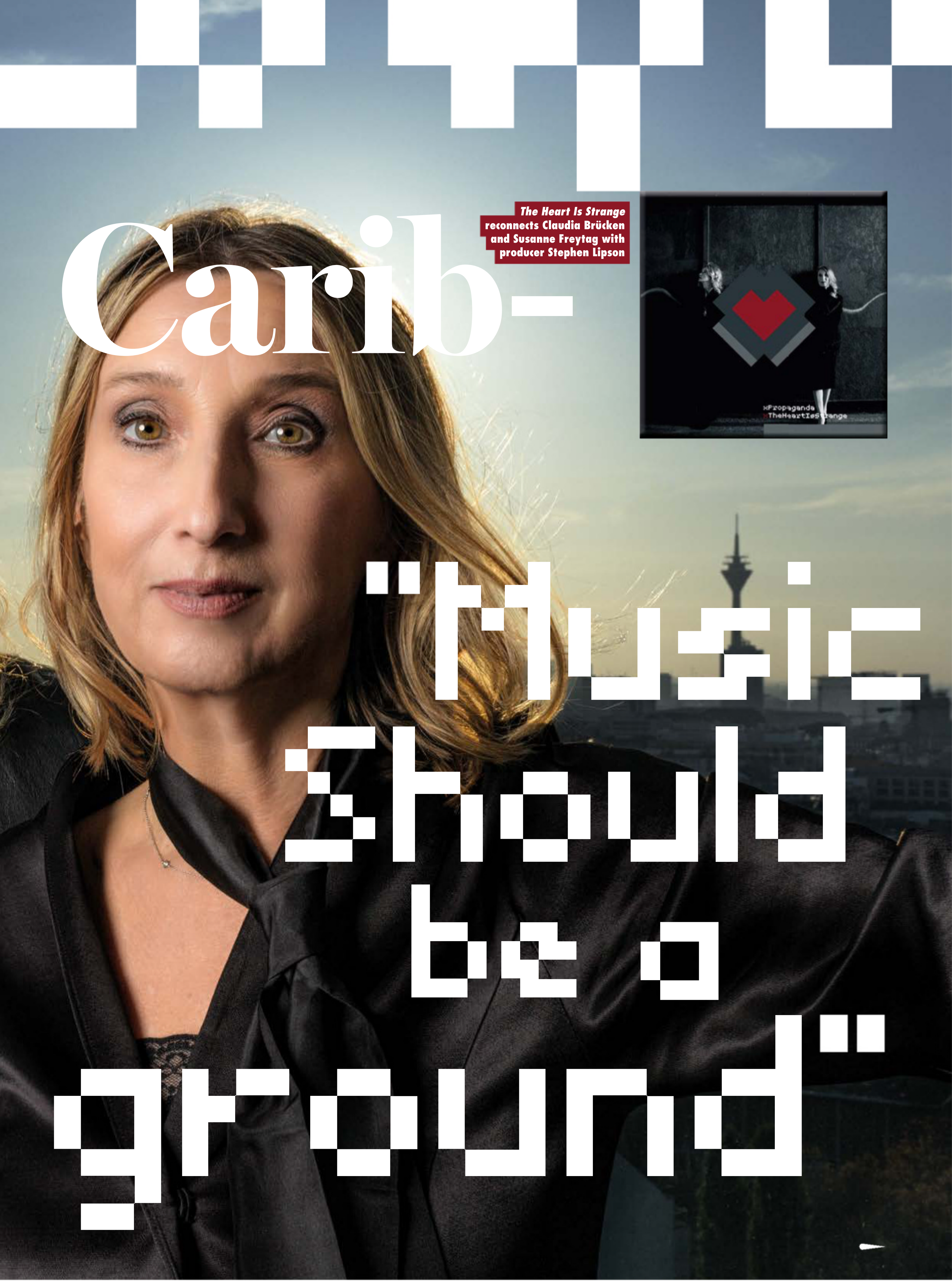

Carib-

The Heart Is Strange reconnects Claudia Brücken and Susanne Freytag with producer Stephen Lipson

"Music should be a ground"

Sometimes, the toughest problems can be resolved by a matter of straightforward practicalities. The making of a new Propaganda album, 37 years after the imperious synth-pop masterpiece *A Secret Wish* looked to be their only major statement, was instigated by a simple wish for the band's singers. Claudia Brücken and Susanne Freytag wanted to start playing live again. There was one major issue to overcome first.

"We realised a Propaganda show would be quite short," smiles Claudia, sat next to Susanne on a sofa at Brücken's home in London. "When we first played together again at The Garage in London in 2018, we had to fill the set out with B-sides. If we were to do more shows, we wanted to play for 70 minutes, not 45. That meant we really needed to write a few fresh songs, if only to make our concerts longer."

That was four years ago. The pandemic has, of course, delayed matters, but was the wait for triumphant comeback album *The Heart Is Strange* also down to the kind of intricately detailed, money-no-object 1980s-budgeted studio sessions exemplified by *A Secret Wish*? Not exactly. Claudia and Susanne would generally meet at Brücken's home, joined by co-writer John Williams, who's fitted in perfectly with the pair since producing the latter's solo album *Where Else* in 2014. "We'd never be so presumptuous as to try to make *A Secret Wish* Part 2," insists Freytag. "It was daunting when we started, thinking, 'OK, which direction do we want to go in after so long?' But we've found our style naturally, without thinking of the stress of trying to make a sequel to *that* record. If you impose that sort of pressure on yourself, forget it, that's no good. Music should be a playground, and where there is similarity between our new record and *A Secret Wish* is that they're both quite playful. We were free of pressure, and instead it was, 'Let's see what happens.' That's what works best."

> "I feel completely bemused when people call A Secret Wish a classic. Nobody really bought it. It's not an initial flop that's sold well over time."
>
> STEPHEN LIPSON

Without a record deal in place, the financial reality when they embarked upon the project in 2019 was a world away from *A Secret Wish*. "John would bring his sandwiches to my house," laughs Claudia. "Then, twice a week, Susanne and I would pack our sandwiches to write at John's. A lot of the budget for this record is sandwiches."

The writing trio were helped by Propaganda's other (sort of) member, Stephen Lipson. The producer of *A Secret Wish*, Lipson played with Propaganda at that 2018 London comeback show. Before becoming a producer for Pet Shop Boys, Grace Jones and Robbie Williams, he'd been a guitarist. "Stephen joining us on stage was so great," smiles Claudia. "Once we started writing, we asked Stephen if he had any backing tracks that we could get our heads into. He lives close by, so we could often meet up."

"I've always stayed in touch with Claudia and Susanne," explains Lipson. "Mostly Claudia, because she's in London and Susanne lives in Berlin. But we've all chatted about life over the years. I have a store of song ideas, so when they asked for backing tracks, it was easy to send ideas over and say, 'How about this?'" One of those ideas became the new album's magnificent 10-minute finale, *Ribbons Of Steel*. "Oh, that was much longer to start with," laughs Stephen. "Me and a producer friend, Pete Murray, had been asked to create a piece for a music library in Los Angeles. We made three pieces of music that segued together into this 20-minute track. Only after we'd sent that in did we learn the library wanted something short and sweet. It had a Propaganda feel to it, so when Claudia and Susanne wanted ideas, it was easy to send them *Ribbons Of Steel*. It's a lovely way to end such a dramatic album, a soothing and peaceful piece to play out."

Asked about Stephen's status in the new line-up now dubbed xPropaganda, Claudia enthuses: "Lippo is so key to the music, I definitely think of him as part of the band. But he might not think of it like that." Susanne adds: "He's in the video for *Don't (You Mess With Me)*. He's performing at the London launch gig for the album. We've played with the idea of Stephen being in the band, I'd say." As predicted by Claudia, Lipson isn't so certain. "I'm their happy helper," he smiles. "I'm not in the band, nor should I be. We work well together and I'm always happy to help out, but we're just buddies, really."

Whatever Stephen's role, the original men from Propaganda aren't involved. The band's labyrinthine line-up started in Kraftwerk's hometown of Düsseldorf in 1982, when Ralf Dörper of industrial rockers Die Krupps started Propaganda with Susanne and artist

Andreas Thein. Flamboyant percussionist Michael Mertens soon joined from the Düsseldorf Symphony Orchestra, while Freytag persuaded Brücken on board, too, after the two had already sung together in B-52s-y art-popsters The Topolinos.

John Peel was an early champion, with listeners including Paul Morley. The journalist wanted ZTT's first signing to arrive from outside Britain, and there was enough mystique about Propaganda to make them ideal. Trevor Horn produced dramatic debut single *Dr Mabuse*. Thein promptly left, fearing Propaganda were about to become too commercial. He sadly died from cancer in 2013. The remaining quartet finished *A Secret Wish* with Lipson. Horn might have been too busy to carry on with Propaganda, but Lipson was the ideal replacement. Not only was he Horn's de facto right-hand man anyway, he was perfect for getting the best out of Susanne's intoxicating melodrama and Claudia's persuasive intimacy. "Stephen is instilled with the ZTT sound," reasons Brücken. "The sound we make together is so attractive."

Although now rightly hailed as a masterpiece, *A Secret Wish* was only a modest commercial success, reaching No.16 in the UK Albums Chart.

"I feel completely bemused when people call *A Secret Wish* a classic," frets Stephen. "Nobody really bought it. It's not an initial flop that's sold well over time, like *The Shawshank Redemption*. It's just never really caught fire. But I didn't reflect on that lack of success, because back then we were always onto making the next record. It's like when people talk about how big the budget was. In the mid-80s, people didn't discuss recording budgets. It was just about trying to make a good record. *A Secret Wish* took a long time, as we were experimenting with new equipment. It was detailed work, and everyone was happy for us to take the time to make it good."

Stephen's bandmates/buddies are more celebratory of their first album's status. "We all knew at the time that we were making something special with *A Secret Wish*," Freytag believes. Brücken agrees, noting: "My first musical experience in a studio was with Trevor Horn. That's an astonishing privilege. But I'd never thought that, nearly 40 years later, people would still be discovering our album."

It didn't help in the detailed process of making *A Secret Wish* that Susanne, Ralf and Michael still lived in Düsseldorf, coming to England for a few days at a time. Claudia soon settled in London, marrying Paul Morley. (The couple separated soon after their daughter Maddy was born.) "We were very young and inexperienced," reflects Susanne. "Our record company contract could have been better, and a different manager could have held us together. It felt like we were being divided into two halves and there were so many different facets to any one story, it was difficult to know what was going on."

In 1986, Claudia left to form Act with Thomas Leer, staying with ZTT, while the rest of Propaganda instead signed to Virgin. By the time second album *1234* was released in 1990, Susanne and Ralf had quit, too, leaving just Michael with a new line-up, including former Simple Minds rhythm section Derek Forbes and Brian McGee. Michael persuaded Susanne to sing on two songs that had been written before Ralf had left. "I didn't want to be involved," she admits now. "I only changed my mind for sentimental reasons when Michael asked me. I had nothing to do with *1234* creatively."

Brücken is still frustrated that a myth has grown up around Propaganda that ZTT boss Trevor Horn and his wife, Jill Sinclair, refused to renegotiate the band's contract. "Jill did invite us to renegotiate our deal," she insists. "But the band decided not to do that. Different management would have encouraged us to at least listen to Jill.

FAULTY P:MACHINERY

After leaving during the sessions for *A Secret Wish*, Andreas Thein had no further part in Propaganda before his death in 2013.

There have been various other reunion line-ups, but the Brücken/Freytag/Dörper/Mertens quartet from *A Secret Wish* have appeared in public just once. In 2004, they played *Dr Mabuse* at a stellar concert celebrating Trevor Horn's career at Wembley Arena, which also featured ABC, Frankie Goes To Hollywood (without Holly Johnson), Pet Shop Boys, Grace Jones, Buggles, Seal, Yes, Belle And Sebastian, Dollar and tATu. The following year, Susanne and Michael released a one-off single, *Valley Of The Machine Gods*.

The most intriguing reunion came when Propaganda signed to EastWest in 1998, with a line-up of Claudia, Susanne and Ralf. Tim Simenon of Bomb The Bass was among the producers, while Martin Gore played guitar on one song. Four years later, nine tracks suddenly leaked online. "Those songs weren't properly produced," insists Claudia now. "They were just demos."

Would xPropaganda ever want that 1998 material to emerge properly? "It's tricky, because it's 24 years later and we've only just finished something new," smiles Freytag. Brücken believes "There were some good ideas in those songs, but I don't think they are worth hearing as they are. There would need to be common ground among everyone for wanting things to happen to them."

Susanne Freytag and Claudia Brücken banging the drum for xPropaganda's new beginnings

© Jimmy King

But there were four different people with different views and agendas. It was tricky."

There have been various efforts to reunite the *A Secret Wish* line-up, but Claudia and Susanne are clearly right for each other 37 years on. Having lived in London for so long, Brücken is more talkative, but Freytag's English is flawless, too, and her dry wit matches her friend's. "I don't think we were conscious in the 80s of how different we were, being women in electronic music," considers Susanne. Claudia adds: "Susanne and I have solidarity, females in a world where there's a lot of male energy."

Again, the band's management didn't help. "There was division in the band, and that division was created," Freytag states. "That made it difficult. We were only in our twenties, and it was difficult to put into words, the feeling of certain attitudes towards women that were accepted, where Claudia and I would think, 'Hmm, I'm not certain what to make of that.' It wasn't a negative experience, but management could have been more inclusive."

The patronising attitude of the press didn't help. Propaganda consisting of two women and two men, making grandiose and at times gothic pop, they were promptly dubbed "ABBA from Hell", a tagline Claudia dismisses as "silly", before Susanne interjects: "I thought it was quite funny. It was so silly that we used it ourselves later on."

This is news to Brücken, who stares at her friend. "Did we?!"

Ralf has returned to playing with Die Krupps, while Michael released music in the 90s with Dreamware and Black Mesa, but has appeared musically quiet since 2011 single *I'm A Cathedral* with Italian dance musician Beppe Loda. "We tried many times to make it work with Michael and Ralf," says Claudia. "It worked beautifully 35 years ago with them, but it became like a relationship that doesn't work. People change." Susanne adds: "You can't try to recreate situations again and again. We're all different people. Claudia and I, this is the moment for now. Once we made the decision it should just be the two of us, it just clicked."

The Heart Is Strange is released under the subtly yet pointedly changed name of xPropaganda. Brücken admits: "The guys weren't happy for us to call ourselves Propaganda. Otherwise, that's what we'd call ourselves." "But it's also a name to show that it's different now," reasons Freytag. "The name xPropaganda shows that Propaganda was then, and here we are now."

In truth, Michael and Ralf's absence isn't really noticeable on *The Heart Is Strange*. As comeback records go, it's unimpeachable, Susanne and Claudia's voices driving heart-racing pop songs still full of unexpected twists. "Susanne and I like our music to be disturbing," laughs Claudia. "But we also like it to be tender. There are lots of contrasts in our work, and we dramatise those contrasts in our words, our delivery, our music. Susanne makes our music beautiful and touching."

For his part, Lipson says: "Our tastes align. The only thing that's not appropriate for Propaganda is swing music. Anything else that comes out of my addled brain is usually appropriate in one way or another for Claudia and Susanne."

To an extent, finally making a record together after so long was like a dam bursting. The single *Don't (You Mess With Me)* was written in less than a day, its message that xPropaganda aren't here to put up with anyone's nonsense pouring out of the pair.

"It was cathartic, that song," laughs Susanne. Claudia adds: "We'd only met

© Kai Freytag

COUNSELLOR MABUSE

Claudia Brücken has continued to be a musician since leaving Propaganda, releasing various solo albums as well as working with artists such as Jimmy Somerville, Blank & Jones, Paul Humphreys, Andy Bell, Glenn Gregory and Tangerine Dream's Jerome Froese. Freytag has established herself in a completely different career. Now living in Berlin, in 2008 Susanne began training as a therapist, specialising in couples' coaching. Did the complexities of Propaganda's own relationship have any influence on her new career? "Oh, I think so," she acknowledges. "It's very funny because, when I was training, I realised there were so many musicians on the course. A lot of people in the music industry go into work like therapy. When you think about it, being in a band is quite a strange social construct: you have a lot of creative individuals together and people performing together. Sometimes, you need help to get your head around it."

Occasionally, Freytag is recognised by clients for her music. "People have asked if I'm the singer from Propaganda," she admits. "That's a little awkward and not so easy, when you consider my new job. But that's the trouble with technology: you can't hide anything. When we performed in the 80s, I thought nobody would see it ever again. I didn't see the internet coming."

As a therapist, Susanne has been able to take leave to work with xPropaganda. "Music has been a nice break," she states.

Susanne and Claudia started using the xPropaganda name in 2018

up to see what we might do that day. Coming out at the end of a session with a song like that, so honest about feeling frustrated, was astonishing." It was also a song where John Williams' help proved invaluable. "Usually, I labour over things," admits Brücken. "I take ages to write a melody. John has a lot of discipline in nailing things down. On my own, I usually think, 'I could sing that word… no, it could be that word.' Having a song like *Don't* flood out was great to experience. Usually, my process is laborious, but it's productive, too, because when I do sing the song, the polishing of what words to sing means it flows better."

> "I don't think we were conscious in the 80s of how different we were, being women in electronic music"
>
> SUSANNE FREYTAG

The compelling *No Ordinary Girl* also flowed beautifully, inspired by Claudia walking through London's bustling Embankment. "I followed this hypnotic sound I could hear in the distance, because I couldn't work out what it was," she recalls. "I realised eventually that it was someone playing steel drums. I thought it'd be cool to recreate that hypnotic feeling, creating a song that was equally mysterious."

The attitude of not putting any pressure on themselves continued throughout recording, as Stephen explains: "Our to-and-fro of writing and recording continued, until we concluded we possibly had an album. We had enough songs to make an album, rather than trying to create an album. It was that way round. Once we had enough songs, why not call it an album and see if we could get a record deal?"

With fateful timing, Universal's catalogue label UMC had recently bought the rights to ZTT's back catalogue – and its name. Once UMC discovered Claudia, Susanne and Stephen had made a new album worthy of *A Secret Wish*, it would have been downright rude not to release it on ZTT. "Where else could it go?" laughs Claudia. "This record follows the sound and mentality of ZTT. ZTT makes a lot of sense for us, and for UMC. Yes, it's unusual for a new album to be released by Universal's catalogue company, but why not? ZTT is where *The Heart Is Strange* should be." "It's like the circle has closed," Susanne smiles. "Everything has come around."

The majestic 43 minutes of *The Heart Is Strange* also means xPropaganda now have enough music to realise their dreams of a 70-minute show to tour. Stephen Lipson, who produced the soundtrack for the last James Bond film *No Time To Die* and is currently working on four albums and movie soundtracks, is too busy to tour. "I like rehearsals for a gig, figuring out how we're going to make it work," he states. "I'm looking at *The Heart Is Strange*, thinking, 'How should it be represented live? If the audience doesn't know this song, does it matter?' It's challenging, but we'll get there. That's the bit I like. Playing a one-off gig is great, but a tour? Not sure. It certainly wouldn't fit with my current life." "Stephen is a busy guy always doing a million things," continues Susanne. "He can play whichever shows he likes, but we know great musicians for when he can't play."

There are whispers of deluxe plans for Propaganda's back catalogue but, after so long without new music, the rebranded xPropaganda are looking to the future. "We've got our focus and we just want to get on with it," summarises Claudia. "Susanne and I, we've recovered." With a future now as strong as their past, for electronic music pioneers Claudia Brücken and Susanne Freytag, x marks the spot. ■

● xPropaganda's album *The Heart Is Strange* is released by ZTT on 20 May and reviewed on page 87. They play at The Garage in London on 24 May.

© Kai Freytag

STAYING OUT FOR THE SUMMER

AS WE FINALLY GEAR OURSELVES UP FOR THE FIRST COMPLETE FESTIVAL SEASON IN THREE YEARS, CLASSIC POP GUIDES YOU THROUGH SOME CHOICE PICKS ON THE MUSICAL CALENDAR

LET'S ROCK
21 MAY – 10 SEPTEMBER

WHERE: Cookham, Norwich, Newport, Sunderland, Edinburgh, Leeds, Exeter, Southampton, Shrewsbury, Liverpool, Bangor (NI), County Meath, Maidstone, Ipswich
WEBSITE: letsrock80s.com

Back in 2019, the last time Let's Rock was able to run a full set of festivals, the brand attracted 150,000 fans to 12 sites. For 2022, it's been expanded to 14 events, the biggest tally to date.

Running across the UK and Éire from late May to early September, the latest series of Let's Rock headliners include Adam Ant, Billy Ocean, OMD, The Human League and Wet Wet Wet.

As ever, Let's Rock will feature a solid bill of acts throughout each day. Familiar faces being welcomed back include ABC, Level 42, Jason Donovan, Tom Bailey, Nik Kershaw and Tony Hadley.

Also unmissable will be sets from ska legends The Selecter, Go West, Belinda Carlisle, Toyah Willcox and the cultured sophisti-pop of Scritti Politti.

Since launching in 2009 with a solitary festival at Cookham Moor in Berkshire, Let's Rock has grown into the UK's biggest retro festival series and a central part of the live music calendar.

ABC's Martin Fry

THE GREAT ESTATE
2–5 JUNE

WHERE: Scorrier House, Redruth, Cornwall
WEBSITE: greatestatefestival.co.uk

The organisers are calling it "diverse and totally rambunctious", and it's fair to say that the old festival adage of 'something for everyone' feels particularly applicable to the wide-ranging acts on offer at The Great Estate.

The always-dependable Manic Street Preachers, veterans of countless headline slots around the world down the years, lead the way for this four-day event in the heart of Cornwall. Likewise, the multi-award-winning DJ Yoda is no stranger to high-profile headline slots – he's been the beating heart of turntablism for more than two decades.

With a new album on the way and fresh from the success of last year's *Streets Of Gold* LP, Electric Six are another must-see act at The Great Estate – great value live, there's so much more to them than just their party-starter hit *Danger! High Voltage*.

Meanwhile, The Sugarhill Gang, Grandmaster Melle Mel's Furious 5 and Scorpio will form a hip-hop supergroup to celebrate the 40th anniversary of *The Message* while Radio 6 Music's Craig Charles will also be on hand for a DJ set.

Manic Street Preachers

A PERFECT DAY: EXETER
3 JULY

WHERE: Powderham Castle, Exeter
WEBSITE: aperfectdayfestival.com or myticket.co.uk

Live promoters Kilimanjaro are launching the first of a series of one-day events at scenic locations across the UK with an inaugural show within the picturesque grounds of Powderham Castle in Exeter.

Singer-songwriter David Gray will be performing his seven million-selling *White Ladder* album in full with his original road band and equipment to recreate the record's live sound, along with a selection of his greatest hits.

Also on the bill will be James Morrison for a career-spanning set and Ivor Novello award-winner Tom Odell. Another must-see, UK soul icon Gabrielle has been making waves for nearly 30 years after breaking through with the No.1 single *Dreams*. She's since had a string of hits including *Give Me A Little More Time*, *Walk On By*, *If You Ever* (with East 17) and *Bridget Jones's Diary* movie soundtrack favourite *Out Of Reach*.

Completing the line-up are Brit country duo The Shires – the first homegrown country act to make it into the Top 10 of the UK Albums Chart – and local folk sisters Wildwood Kin.

© Derrick Santini
David Gray

ROCHESTER CASTLE CONCERTS
6–9 JULY

WHERE: Rochester Castle, Kent
WEBSITE: rochestercastleconcerts.com

The beautiful 12th century Rochester Castle in Kent plays host to four nights of A-list talent this summer.

Kicking off the series of shows at the English Heritage property will be The Human League on 6 July – *Classic Pop* readers will certainly need no introduction to Sheffield's finest.

Twitter wit extraordinaire James Blunt headlines the following night. After 15 years toiling at the coalface of sensitive song, Blunt has sold more than 20 million albums and as many singles.

On 8 July, the Castle hosts American funk band Cameo, and the question that's on everybody's lips is will Larry Blackmon be wearing his trademark codpiece? Expect all the hits including *Word Up!* and much more.

Finally, on 9 July, ska icons The Specials will be playing. After reforming in 2008, the band consolidated their return with the outstanding comeback album *Encore* in 2019 and followed it last year with emotive covers collection *Protest Songs 1924-2012*.

The Specials

CORNBURY FESTIVAL
8–10 JULY

WHERE: Great Tew Park near Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire
WEBSITE: cornburyfestival.com

The 'distinguished gent' of the Cotswold festivals scene, Cornbury will sign off with something very special for their farewell weekender.

Starting back in 2004 at Cornbury Park and moving to Great Tew in 2011, the festival has played host to an array of A-list headliners over the years including Amy Winehouse and Elvis Costello to Paul Simon, Ray Davies and a much-anticipated reunion of The Faces.

For the last Cornbury Festival, the 2022 bill welcomes back a number of favourite artists.

Joining the heavyweight line-up of headliners that boasts Bryan Adams, James Blunt, The Darkness, The Waterboys, Ronan Keating and Jools Holland will be Mica Paris, The Magic Numbers, Altered Images and The Christians.

Also on the bill will be a well-chosen selection of folk, blues and alternative artists such as Alice Russell, Get Cape Wear Cape Fly, William The Conqueror, Ferris & Sylvester, Andy Fairweather Low, Amy Montgomery, Beans On Toast and many more.

The Darkness

POPWORLD FESTIVAL 2022
6 AUGUST

WHERE: Millennium Square, Leeds
WEBSITE: popworldparty.co.uk/popworld-festival

5ive
© Marco Vittur

Staged at Millennium Square in Leeds, the Popworld Festival welcomes a host of big name chart acts to the heart of the city. Leading the way is Peter Andre, whose music career now stretches back almost 30 years to his eponymous debut studio album. It was two years later, though, that signature hit *Mysterious Girl* first turned heads and he followed it with the chart-topping singles *Flava* and *I Feel You*.

Now slimmed down to a three-piece from their original seven-member configuration, also featuring in the Leeds line-up is S Club who had an extraordinary run of 11 Top 5 hits in the UK on the bounce between 1999 and 2003.

Back with their first studio album in more than 20 years and also slimmed down to a trio are boyband turned manband 5ive. Others on board for Popworld this year include The Cheeky Girls, Fatman Scoop and Whigfield.

LIVE AT SCORRIER HOUSE
27 AUGUST

WHERE: Scorrier House, Redruth, Cornwall
WEBSITE: liveatscorrierhouse.co.uk

A unique one-day festival that includes camping, what better way to spend your August Bank Holiday weekend than at the picturesque Scorrier House, the family-run country estate in the heart of Cornwall. Grab your pop-up tent and crash at the end of the night then head off to the beach on Sunday to catch the last of the summer rays.

Headlining the event with a full live show will be those doyens of big beat, Groove Armada. Comprising the duo of Andy Cato and Tom Findlay, Groove Armada first found fame with the laidback classic *At The River* before upping the ante with the dubby *Superstylin'* and club anthem *I See You Baby*.

Also headlining Live At Scorrier House will be electronic favourites Morcheeba who, across a back catalogue that now stretches to an impressive 10 studio albums, have refined their relaxed grooves, boasting Top 10 UK chart entries *Fragments Of Freedom* and *Charango*. Elsewhere, there's Dr Meaker and Tuba Libres plus a plethora of as-yet-unannounced DJ sets are promised.

Groove Armada

LITTLE ORCHARD CIDER & MUSIC FESTIVAL
9-11 SEPTEMBER

WHERE: Healey's Cyder Farm, Penhallow near Truro, Cornwall
WEBSITE: cornwallciderfestival.co.uk

Run by the same team as The Great Estate, Little Orchard Festival brings 90s indie favourites Feeder and Kula Shaker to their main stage for a charming Cornish party.

The line-up for the ninth year of the festival also includes a plethora of local acts and emerging indie/alternative bands plus West Country favourites The Wurzels.

Main stage highlights include platinum-selling Welsh rockers Feeder. The Kerrang Hall Of Fame inductees have enjoyed a string of hits over the past 25 years including *High*, *Buck Rogers*, *Tumble And Fall*, *Feeling A Moment* and *Just The Way I'm Feeling* across an impressive seven Top 10 UK studio albums.

Returning with their sixth studio album *1st Congregational Church Of Eternal Love And Free Hugs* – we're reviewing it this issue on page 92 – Kula Shaker are also among this year's headliners. Their 1996 debut album *K* topped the charts in the UK and included the hits *Tattva*, *Hey Dude* and *Govinda*.

Kula Shaker

LISTINGS

BST HYDE PARK
WHERE: Hyde Park, London
WHEN: Various dates, June and July
FEATURING: The Rolling Stones, Adele, Elton John, Pearl Jam, Pixies, Duran Duran, Nile Rodgers & Chic

MIGHTY HOOPLA
WHERE: Brockwell Park, London
WHEN: 3-4 June
FEATURING: Steps, Sugababes, Five Star, Confidence Man, Anastacia, 2 Unlimited, Jessie Ware, Natalie Imbruglia, Kim Wilde

KITE
WHERE: Kirtlington Park, Oxfordshire
WHEN: 10-12 June
FEATURING: Grace Jones, TLC, Self Esteem, Saint Etienne, Confidence Man, Mavis Staples, Tom Misch

THE CAMBRIDGE CLUB
WHERE: Childerley Orchard, Cambridge
WHEN: 10-12 June
FEATURING: Diana Ross, Nile Rodgers & Chic, The Jacksons, TLC, Level 42, Gabrielle, Mica Paris, Corinne Bailey Rae

ISLE OF WIGHT FESTIVAL
WHERE: Seaclose Park, Isle Of Wight
WHEN: 16-19 June
FEATURING: Lewis Capaldi, Madness, Nile Rodgers & Chic, Kasabian, Happy Mondays

GLASTONBURY FESTIVAL
WHERE: Worthy Farm, Pilton
WHEN: 22-26 June
FEATURING: Billie Eilish, Paul McCartney, Diana Ross, The Avalanches, Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds, Pet Shop Boys, Primal Scream

BLUEDOT
WHERE: Jodrell Bank Observatory, Cheshire
WHEN: 21-24 July
FEATURING: Björk, Groove Armada, Metronomy

STANDON CALLING
WHERE: Standon, Hertfordshire
WHEN: 21-24 July
FEATURING: Madness, Primal Scream, Sugababes, Self Esteem

REWIND
WHERE AND WHEN: Perth, Scotland (22-24 July), Cheshire (5-7 August), Henley-on-Thames (19-21 August)
FEATURING: Holly Johnson, Billy Ocean, Heaven 17, Altered Images, Kim Wilde, Level 42

TRAMLINES
WHERE: Hillsborough Park, Sheffield
WHEN: 22-24 July
FEATURING: Sam Fender, Kasabian, Madness, James, The Wombats, The Coral

KALEIDOSCOPE
WHERE: Alexandra Palace, London
WHEN: 23 July
FEATURING: Orbital, Happy Mondays, Charlotte Church's Late Night Pop Dungeon, The Magic Numbers, House Gospel Choir

KENDAL CALLING
WHERE: Lowther Deer Park, Lake District
WHEN: 28-31 July
FEATURING: Supergrass, Stereophonics, Sophie Ellis Bextor, Haçienda Classiçal, The Wombats, The Kooks

FIELD DAY
WHERE: Victoria Park, London
WHEN: 20 August
FEATURING: Chemical Brothers, Kraftwerk 3D

Captain Morgan

THE POPWORLD FESTIVAL

06.08.22

17.30 - 22.30

PETER ANDRE / WHIGFIELD / 5IVE
FATMAN SCOOP / S CLUB
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CLASSIC POP TOP TEN

WEEK ENDING 10 MAY 1986

FALCO PAYS TRIBUTE TO AN ICONIC COMPOSER, GEORGE MICHAEL BARES HIS SOUL AND THE LATE MARVIN GAYE SCORES A POSTHUMOUS HIT

STEVE O'BRIEN

01 (2) **ROCK ME AMADEUS**
FALCO
(A&M)

02 (4) **LIVE TO TELL**
MADONNA
(SIRE)

ROCK ME AMADEUS
FALCO (A&M)

Though it seems odd now for a pop song about an 18th century Austrian composer to be the UK's biggest single, it had been only two years since Miloš Forman's Oscars-guzzling biopic of the classical giant had stormed the British box office. Composed by Falco (real name: Johann 'Hans' Hölzel) with Dutch producer brothers Bolland & Bolland, its lyrics are mostly delivered in German, and celebrates Mozart's supposed punk spirit (translated into English, the words read: "With a bottle of wine in one hand and a woman in the other/ His mind was on rock and roll and having fun/ Because he lived so fast he had to die so young/ But he made his mark in history/ Still everybody says: Rock me Amadeus."). Falco would enjoy just one more Top 10 hit in the UK before his tragic death, in a car crash, in 1998.

ON MY OWN
PATTI LABELLE & MICHAEL MCDONALD (MCA)

Written by the great Burt Bacharach and then missus Carole Bayer Sager and originally intended for Dionne Warwick's 1985 long-player *Friends*, *On My Own* would eventually become a hit for Patti LaBelle and former Doobie Brothers keyboardist Michael McDonald. Taken from LaBelle's eighth album, *Winner In You*, the duet was recorded with both singers in different cities, a situation that was repeated when it came to the video, with LaBelle and McDonald lensed separately. The song became the most successful single for both vocalists, hitting No.1 on the Billboard Hot 100.

LIVE TO TELL
MADONNA (SIRE)

Released as the lead 45 off third studio album *True Blue*, *Live To Tell* started life as a Patrick Leonard-composed instrumental, intended for the 1986 big screen slush-fest *Fire With Fire*. But when Madonna heard the track, she decided to add lyrics for use in her then-husband Sean Penn's movie *At Close Range*. "Sometimes when I'm writing songs, I'm just channelling," Madonna explained to *Rolling Stone* magazine in 2009. "I could say that *Live To Tell* was about my childhood, my relationship with my parents, my father and my stepmother. But maybe not. It could be about something in an F Scott Fitzgerald novel or a story that I heard once. It's true, but it's not necessarily autobiographical."

LESSONS IN LOVE
LEVEL 42 (POLYDOR)

Peaking at No.3, *Lessons In Love* would be Level 42's biggest hit on home soil (it would top the charts in Spain, Germany, South Africa, Switzerland and Finland and make No.12 in the US). To this day, it's Mark King and co's signature number, spun from their joint most successful album in the UK, *Running In The Family* (it ties with *Staring At The Sun*, both of which made No.2). Written by Mark King with Wally Badarou and Boon Gould, *Lessons In Love* appeared almost a year before the album it's attached to and 10 months before the LP's second single. "At this time," recalled King to *Songwriter Magazine*, "[Gould] was in love with the whole alliteration thing, which is why it's 'lessons in love' and there's 'lifeboat', 'lies', 'lost at sea' and that sort of stuff. It was a fantastic lyric, something that was a stroke of genius."

▲	03	(9) **LESSONS IN LOVE** **LEVEL 42** (POLYDOR)
▲	04	(19) **ON MY OWN** **PATTI LABELLE & MICHAEL MCDONALD** (MCA)
▼	05	(3) **WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY** **JANET JACKSON** (A&M)
▼	06	(1) **A DIFFERENT CORNER** **GEORGE MICHAEL** (EPIC)
	07	(7) **CAN'T WAIT ANOTHER MINUTE** **FIVE STAR** (TENT)
▲	08	(11) **I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE** **MARVIN GAYE** (TAMLA MOTOWN)
▼	09	(6) **A KIND OF MAGIC** **QUEEN** (EMI)
	10	(10) **GREATEST LOVE OF ALL** **WHITNEY HOUSTON** (ARISTA)

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY
JANET JACKSON (A&M)

Janet's first UK hit (her first single over here, the Cliff Richard duet *Two To The Power*, bombed at No.83) was originally intended by its writers Jam & Lewis for one of their own records. The duo had finished recording Jackson's third studio album, *Control*, when A&M requested one more up-tempo number for the record. Jimmy and Terry exhumed the track and rewrote the lyrics for the singer, reflecting Janet's feelings about her recent annulment from James DeBarge. Released as the lead single from the LP, it announced Janet Jackson as a major new force in pop, hitting No.4 in the US and No.3 in the UK.

CAN'T WAIT ANOTHER MINUTE
FIVE STAR (TENT)

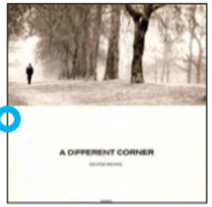
Five Star couldn't wait another minute to cover this B-side from female trio Lewis. Released just a month before the Pearson Family 's version, *Can't Wait Another Minute* was the flipside to the girls' *If The Love Fits*. Of course, few had ever heard of Lewis, or indeed their underperforming single, so Five Star were able to claim this one as their own. The cover shot the family group into the Top 10 in the UK, while taking them to No.41 on the US Billboard chart – their highest entry Stateside, no doubt helped by its inclusion on the soundtrack to 1986 Michael Keaton comedy flick *Gung Ho*.

A KIND OF MAGIC
QUEEN (EMI)

Penned by Roger Taylor and taken from the LP of the same name, *A Kind Of Magic* acted as the end theme for one of 1986's biggest movies, fantasy epic *Highlander* (the phrase is used by Christopher Lambert's character as a description of his immortality). It would peak at No.3 in the UK and No.42 in the States.

GREATEST LOVE OF ALL
WHITNEY HOUSTON (ARISTA)

A rare cover from Whitney, this was first a hit for George Benson in 1977 and since then it's seen further interpretations by such artists as Shirley Bassey, Oleta Adams, Alexandra Burke and Kevin Rowland. Whitney's take topped the charts in Australia, Canada and the US and peaked at No.8 in Blighty.



A DIFFERENT CORNER
GEORGE MICHAEL (EPIC)

Though a solo hit for George Michael, Wham! were still active when *A Different Corner* was released. At the time of its writing, while he and Andrew Ridgeley were riding high commercially, George himself was at a low point in his life. "I felt like shit," he explained to *Musician Magazine*. "I went in and recorded exactly the way I felt, and that's the way it sounds. It was partly Wham! and partly the end of a relationship. It was the farthest I'd ever fallen, and in a very short period of time. I had to get rid of it somehow, I had to write about it." The song would be George's second UK No.1 after *Careless Whisper*, making him the first solo act in the history of the UK chart to reach No.1 with his first two releases.

I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE
MARVIN GAYE (TAMLA MOTOWN)

Marvin Gaye had been gone for two years by the time Motown decided to re-release the singer's most famous song. Originally a No.1 in the UK in 1969, the reissue would peak at No.8, off the back of it soundtracking a now-iconic ad for Levi's jeans, starring model Nick Kamen. Yes, now you at home could stick the song on your turntable while you stripped down to your boxers and shoved your clothes in a washing machine. In 1998, *I Heard It Through The Grapevine* was inducted to the Grammy Hall of Fame for "historical, artistic and significant" value.

ONE OF THE MUSIC WORLD'S GREAT ADVENTURERS, EVEN BY DAVE STEWART'S STANDARDS HIS NEW PROJECT EBONY McQUEEN IS AMBITIOUS: A MOVIE WITH AN ACCOMPANYING TRIPLE-ALBUM BOXSET. IT ALSO ALLOWS HIM TO REFLECT ON HOW A FOOTBALL-OBSESSED SUNDERLAND TEENAGER BECAME ONE OF POP'S GREAT COLLABORATORS. IN A WIDE-RANGING INTERVIEW TAKING IN DRUNK PIRATES IN THE CARIBBEAN AND BOB DYLAN'S LOVE OF COCKTAILS, HE TELLS US: "I'VE GOT AN INQUISITIVE MIND."

JOHN EARLS

© All images courtesy of Dave Stewart unless otherwise stated

TEENAGE KICKS

Dave Stewart in one of his many musical guises as ringleader of the VaVoom Rock'n'Roll Circus at the El Rey Theater, Los Angeles

When Dave Stewart sat down to pen his autobiography *Sweet Dreams Are Made Of This* in 2016, he faced a major problem. "I was bored writing about my life after Eurythmics," he admits. "I preferred writing about my life before, about growing up." Dave isn't one for detailed plans, but the chance to write about the pivotal time when music came into his life has now inspired *Ebony McQueen* – a fantastical film and boxset of how Stewart swapped his obsession for football into becoming a piratical adventurer in music, from teenage folkie via synth-pop overlord to restless genre investigator.

The inspiration for the project was meeting a woman named Ebony McQueen while Dave was out on his bike near his home in the Bahamas. He recalls: "As I cycled home, I began singing: 'Ebony McQueen, I think I met her once inside a time machine.'" More lyrics arrived for the absurdly catchy, almost nursery rhyme melody. "When I got home, I began thinking about using an orchestra, this song getting bigger and bigger in my head, while I'm in the basement of our 200-year-old house, where drunken pirates would be tossed years ago. I realised the song was becoming autobiographical, I thought: 'Hmm, that's interesting. How *did* I start this journey?'"

Talking to *Classic Pop* in his suite at fashionable London hotel Ham Yard, the next two hours are a brilliant voyage of discovery. Dave doesn't so much answer questions as use them as jumping off points for the next idea to arrive in his bustling mind. He's a brilliant one-off, sweet, funny and unguarded. "I've got a million stories like that," says Stewart after remembering how he sang *Many Rivers To Cross* at 2am on German radio with Jimmy Cliff while the pair were drunk. He's right – Dave's life seems a guide for how many adventures it's possible to fit in, if you're up for a laugh. "My mam said I could be very tiring," he smiles. "She'd be washing up when suddenly a bird's nest would come flying in the window while I'd be shouting: 'Worms!' and run off, on to the next thing. I've got an inquisitive mind."

With so much going on in Dave's head, he found it easiest to become obsessed, lasering in on one area of focus. At first, it was football. He played three games a day, hoping to get signed by his local team, Sunderland. Then, in 1965, aged 13, a bad tackle shattered Dave's knee. "When I woke up in hospital, the surgeon said: 'Don't worry, son, you'll be playing football again in a year," remembers Dave, showing us the scar. "But when you're 13, a year is forever. And the atmosphere at home was depressing, because mam had left."

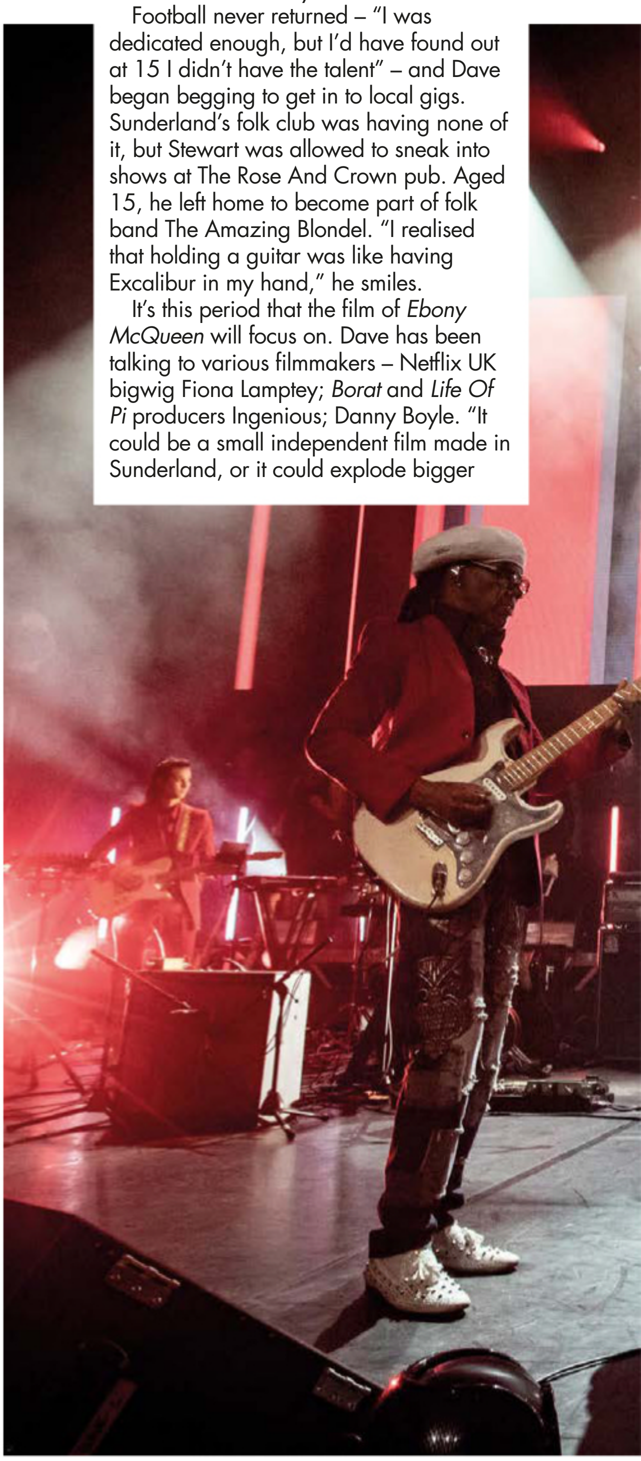
This mood inspired the self-explanatory *What's The Fucking Point?* on *Ebony McQueen*. "When your mam has left and you're at home with nothing to do when you should be at school, life can be bleak and vacuous," he reasons. "Sunderland has grey skies a lot of the time and I started getting the beginnings of a depression. I was staying in bed for ages, thinking, 'I don't get it. Is this what life is, just being here?'" Even though his life is as rich as can be, Dave discloses that he's essentially melancholic. "If you've got an inquisitive mind, you can't suddenly switch it off," he explains. "You don't go, 'Right, now I'm going to go over there and relax.' Tranquillity and being at peace with myself after all the stuff that's gone on in my life would be good, but I don't think there's any hope of that."

Spoiler alert: music proved to be Stewart's salvation. Dave's older brother John played in a band covering Woody Guthrie and their cousin Ian was a blues obsessive who, at 13, adopted a Memphis drawl. "You can imagine the response," laughs Dave. "All the other kids were going: 'Shut the fuck up, talk properly!' Ian didn't care and, as soon as he was 18, he was gone to Memphis. He's still there. When I made my blues film *Deep Blues*, Ian helped find some of the locations in Memphis. His drawl is really strong now, you'd never guess he was from Sunderland."

One day, a box of blues albums arrived for Ian. Dave had grown up listening to his father's collection of musical soundtracks by Rogers & Hammerstein such as *The King And I*. "I put on one of Ian's blues albums and hearing, 'Weeelll!' in an empty house in Sunderland, I thought, 'What's *this*?' It sounded like magic, which of course it absolutely was."

Football never returned – "I was dedicated enough, but I'd have found out at 15 I didn't have the talent" – and Dave began begging to get in to local gigs. Sunderland's folk club was having none of it, but Stewart was allowed to sneak into shows at The Rose And Crown pub. Aged 15, he left home to become part of folk band The Amazing Blondel. "I realised that holding a guitar was like having Excalibur in my hand," he smiles.

It's this period that the film of *Ebony McQueen* will focus on. Dave has been talking to various filmmakers – Netflix UK bigwig Fiona Lamptey; *Borat* and *Life Of Pi* producers Ingenious; Danny Boyle. "It could be a small independent film made in Sunderland, or it could explode bigger



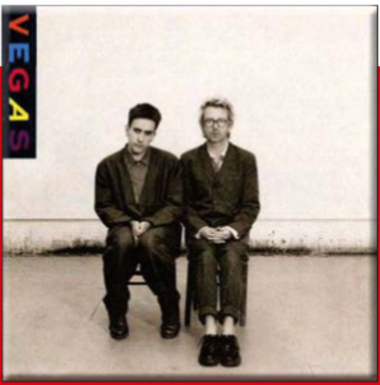
"IF YOU'VE GOT AN INQUISITIVE MIND, YOU CAN'T SUDDENLY SWITCH IT OFF"

because it's so fantastical," ponders Dave. He's already cast the love interest for the teenage Dave, Priya Prakash Varrier. Dave learned about her via a BBC News headline: "The actress whose wink stopped India," after Priya's cheeky wink in the 2019 film *Oru Adaar Love* scandalised conservative communities in the country. "She's funny and outrageous," enthuses Dave.

In examining Stewart's teenage life, *Ebony McQueen* chronicles his troubled times trying to learn music in school. *Mr Jolly* remembers the overbearing music teacher who dismissed his dreams as "idiotic". But it wasn't all bad news. "There's always a hero in every school," he reflects. "Mine was Dick Bradshaw. He taught English, but he was the first person to encourage my interest in music. I saw him playing bluesy jazz on the school piano and it was a revelation. I didn't even know grown-ups could like music. The first record I ever made was a song Mr Bradshaw wrote." It led Dave to get his first interview, in the *Sunderland Echo*. He laughs: "At 15, I'd seen postcards of palm trees and I said to the paper: 'I'm going to live in the Caribbean and teach guitar.' And last year, I was teaching guitar to a bunch of kids near my house on a tropical island."

Before the film, *Ebony McQueen*'s expansive soundtrack is out in May, as a triple-vinyl boxset also housing two 7" singles and two cassettes. It's a fabulous head-spinning journey, a wonderful tribute to the power of music. "The songs in the film keep the narrative going," explains Dave. "The albums have other songs about those 12 weeks of my life when I discovered blues. There are songs like the title track which you won't be able to get out of your head."

As gorgeous as the *Ebony McQueen* package is, its records and cassettes are an old-school move from a musician who's been at the forefront of technology. After all, Dave's 1998 album *SlyFi* was one of the first to be released exclusively online. "I think I was *the* first person to release an album on the internet," he insists mildly. "David Bowie claimed he was first. Well, maybe… Very few people understood the possibilities then, certainly. It was another few years before Napster came along and showed what would happen. The speed to be able to download songs easily had caught up by then." He remembers convening a meeting with other musicians in the interim, wondering what could be done to protect musicians' rights. Among the attendees were Stevie Wonder, Dr Dre, Bob Dylan, Quincy Jones and Lou Reed. While talking about terrible record deals, Stevie recalled how

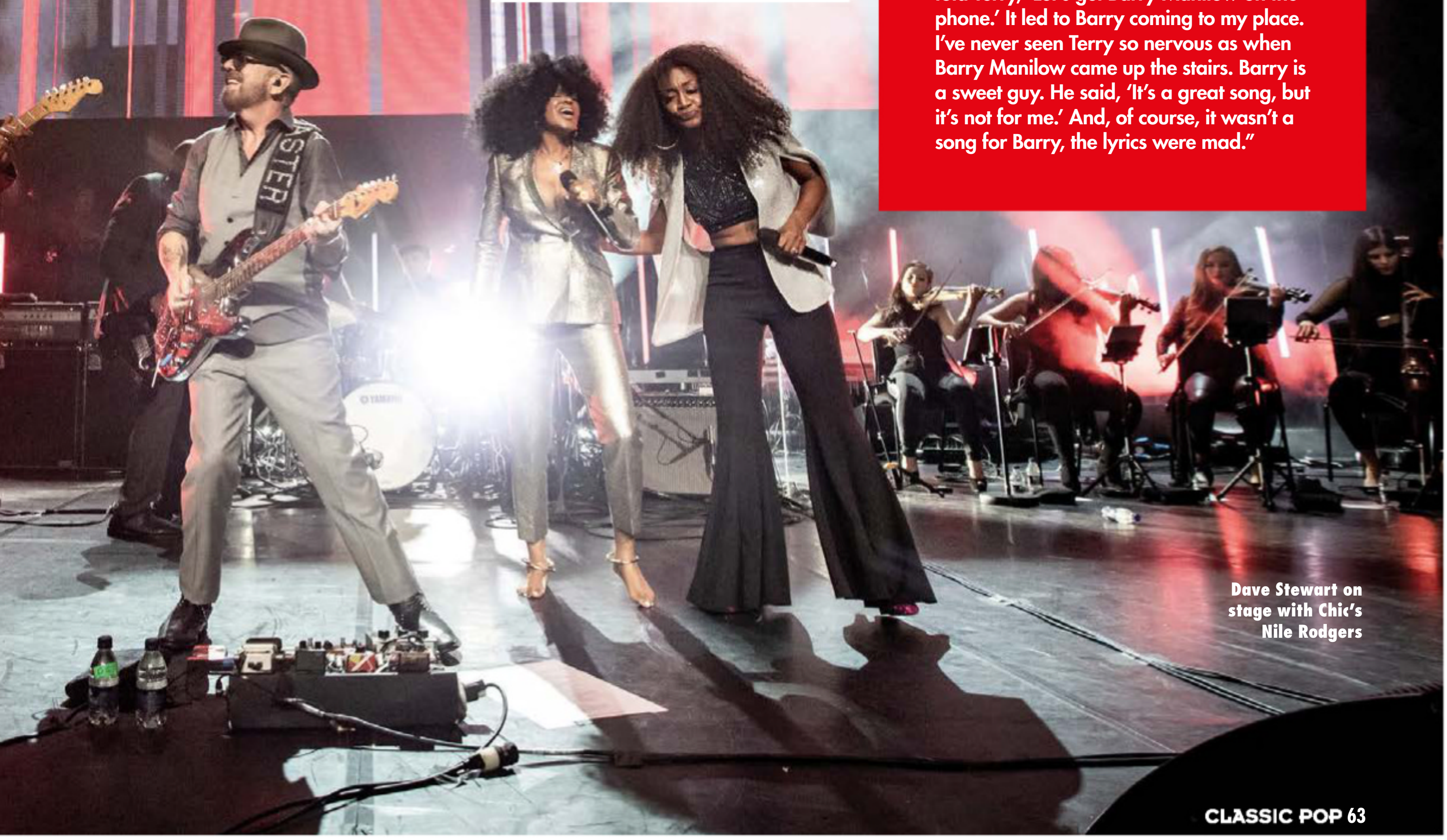


VIVA LOST VEGAS

This year marks the 30th anniversary of one of pop's great lost collaborations: Vegas, Dave Stewart's duo with Terry Hall. The pair released an elegant self-titled album and enjoyed a Top 40 hit with *Possessed*. "Terry and I talk on Instagram a lot," reveals Dave. "He said to me recently: 'Vegas have lost gems and it was a lovely time in my life.' It's annoying our album isn't even available on streaming." He promptly texts legendary exec Merck Mercuriadis, head of music investment firm Hipgnosis, asking if Merck can investigate making *Vegas* available again.

BMG gave Terry and Dave money to make a documentary about their album. "Instead, we decided to remake sections of *The Shining* in a disused hotel casino in Cannes," laughs Dave. "We snuck in there, using a trolley we'd nicked from a supermarket as a camera dolly. The footage is in storage somewhere – we didn't dare show it to BMG, as it was so insane."

The pair also persuaded Barry Manilow to go to Dave's home in Covent Garden to discuss covering Vegas' *The Trouble With Lovers*. Dave recalls: "We were in a crappy hotel in Liverpool when, to cheer us up, I told Terry, 'Let's get Barry Manilow on the phone.' It led to Barry coming to my place. I've never seen Terry so nervous as when Barry Manilow came up the stairs. Barry is a sweet guy. He said, 'It's a great song, but it's not for me.' And, of course, it wasn't a song for Barry, the lyrics were mad."



Dave Stewart on stage with Chic's Nile Rodgers

Motown wanted to drop him when he was still known as Little Stevie Wonder, because his voice had broken. "Motown boss Berry Gordy's son was there, too," smiles Dave. "He was trying to stop Stevie from explaining how cut-throat his dad was. Stevie ignored him, telling everyone how he went home and wrote *Uptight* to try to stay positive."

Even such powerhouses weren't able to stop the juggernaut that led to the controversies around streaming royalties, but at least Dave had the foresight to see trouble ahead. "It can be hard being first, because the technology often isn't there to back you up," he reasons. "That means that not everyone will see the possibilities." Nor is Dave a businessman. "I'm *terrible* with money," he notes.

Dave's attitude to cash was partly shaped by his stepfather, Julian. He met Dave's mother Sadie while she was taking night classes, which eventually led to her getting a degree from Durham University and becoming a headteacher at a special needs school in London.

Dave Stewart's Bahamas life is a far cry from his time in Sunderland

"Julian was one of my big influences," recalls Dave. "He was a zen Buddhist who didn't want anything to do with materialistic things. My dad was amazing about it all, because he gave my mam away when she married Julian."

Another admirer of Julian was Bob Dylan, when he and Dave were good friends in the 90s. "Mam and Julian lived in Maida Vale," Dave remembers. "Before me and Bob would go to The Church studios, he'd say, 'Shall we go and see your mother and Julian?' Bob was fascinated by Julian, who wrote haikus. Bob's favourite was: 'This dunked biscuit/Will it, won't it/ Reach my mouth?'" Their friendship has been endlessly analysed by Dylanologists, but was in reality pretty simple. Stewart explains: "People assume we were making an album, but really we were messing about. We'd just have an interesting time, because he was having a bit of a break from being Bob Dylan. He'd sing songs around our kitchen table, wearing a Mexican hat and drinking margaritas."

Such adventures have led to one of the great misconceptions about Dave Stewart. Asked what makes him such a good collaborator with other musicians, he beams: "I'm glad you ask that, because a lot of people say 'Dave Stewart hangs around a lot of famous musicians', as if I'm a hanger-on. Whether it's Mick Jagger or Stevie Nicks, whoever, I'm inspired and excited about others' ideas and I have the ability to inspire them in return." Dave says he listens to singers and lets them frame their melodies, rather than trying to force his accompaniment on them. "You could see that happening in the acoustic sections of Eurythmics shows," he points out.

His old partnership with Annie Lennox also emphasises Dave's abilities as a producer. "Producing is about bringing out the dynamics of a song," he reasons. "When multi-track studios came in, people stopped mixing songs dynamically. Instead, people began balancing out all these channels. With Eurythmics, I went back to eight-track studios. Even when we recorded on 24-track studios, I'd only use eight. Our songs sounded exciting on the radio because Annie's voice was so loud. You need to remember what should be emphasised. When Edith Piaf sings, nobody is saying, 'But I can't hear the drums.'"

"BOB DYLAN WOULD SING SONGS AROUND OUR KITCHEN TABLE, WEARING A MEXICAN HAT AND DRINKING MARGARITAS"

It's clear that Dave continues to have 25 great ideas before breakfast. He talks excitedly of plans for an album mixing acoustic guitar and orchestration. "Part of my personality is feeling that anything is possible," he summarises. "Certain people like Annie have brought magic into my life. There's a line in *Ebony McQueen* that totally sums it up for me: 'What was real to me is whatever I thought it could be.' I believe that, and it's led me to have an incredible life." And that's Dave Stewart: living out a fantasy life in real time. ■

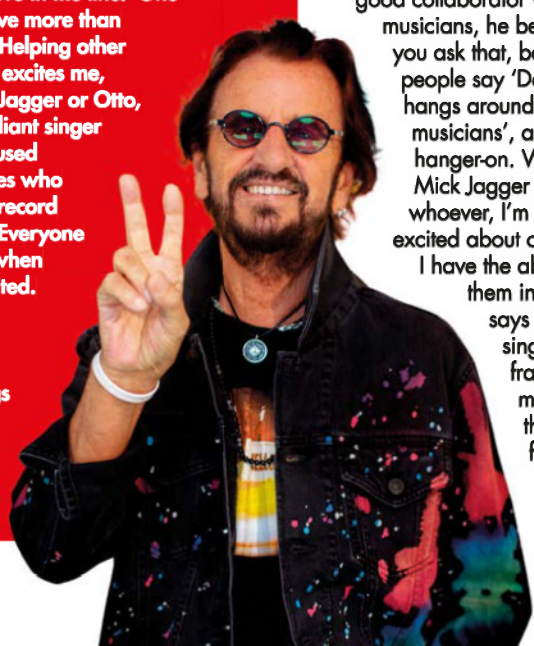
● ***Ebony McQueen* is released by Bay Street in May**

THE STARR ATTRACTION

The *Ebony McQueen* soundtrack features Ringo Starr drumming on the optimistic *One Morning*. "Ringo and I mess around playing together all the time," Dave reveals. "If I haven't properly worked a song out yet, I'll play on a 12-string guitar and record Ringo on my iPhone while he's playing in the drum room in his house. We work so well together because we've got the same approach, that it's about the dynamics. When he drums, Ringo plays the song."

When Dave began recording *One Morning*, "Ringo was already playing on the song from us working it out together. You can't hear my strumming, just Ringo playing really loud. You can tell it's Ringo straight away, because he knows how to be the ideal accompaniment. I'm so pleased it's on that song, because it's the most positive track I could write: 'One morning, it'll be better than it ever was.' I really believe in the line: 'One morning, you'll give more than you're receiving.' Helping other musicians is what excites me, whether it's Mick Jagger or Otto, a 22-year-old brilliant singer who lives in a disused post office in Wales who I've signed to my record label, Bay Street. Everyone has a good time when musicians get excited.

"Ringo is still excited, and he's a funny guy, too. Whenever he rings me, he always asks, 'Is Mr Busy there?'"



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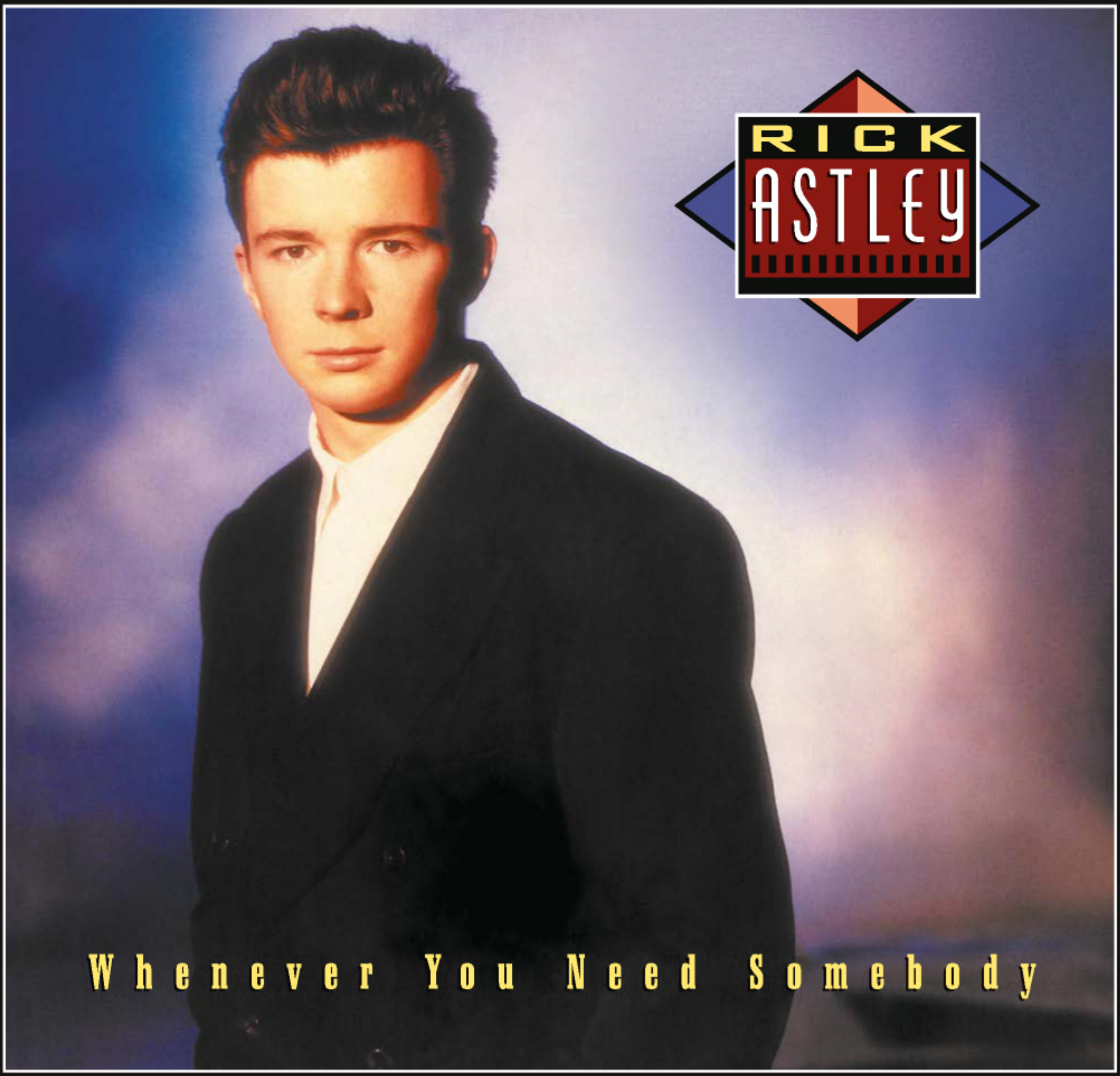

‘WHENEVER YOU NEED SOMEBODY’
2022 REMASTER

The smash hit debut album, remastered at Abbey Road

Featuring the hit singles
‘Never Gonna Give You Up’, ‘Whenever You Need Somebody’,
‘When I Fall In Love’ and ‘Together Forever’

Available on CD / 2CD Deluxe / Digital Deluxe

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OUT MAY 20TH

BMG

Danny Wilson - Bebop Moptop

THERE WAS MORE TO SCOTTISH SOPHISTI-POP BAND DANNY WILSON THAN CLASSIC SINGLE MARY'S PRAYER. MATT PHILLIPS EXPLORES THEIR UNDERRATED SECOND ALBUM, WHICH TOOK INSPIRATION FROM THE ENTIRE POP PANTHEON, FROM COLE PORTER TO PRINCE.

★ ★

This very magazine could have been named for Danny Wilson: they were on a mission to create classic pop via influences such as Bacharach & David, Steely Dan, Stevie Wonder, Billy Mackenzie, Hall & Oates, Tom Waits and Frank Sinatra. The latter, of course, supplied the name of the band and also their 1987 debut album, courtesy of his 1952 movie *Meet Danny Wilson*.

The only thing missing was sustained mainstream commercial success. Classic single *Mary's Prayer* only made it into the UK Top 40 at its third attempt, eventually reaching an impressive No.3 during April 1988 (it also reached No.23 on the US Hot 100). But how would Danny Wilson follow up such an auspicious debut hit and album? According to chief singer/songwriter Gary Clark, they set their own high standards: "Pressure doesn't necessarily come from the record label. It comes from your own desire to be competitive, from management, from peers. The trick is trying to stay true to your artistic vision."

Meet Danny Wilson had been recorded in a handful of studios in various countries, with sundry guest musicians. For *Bebop Moptop*, something a lot more home-grown was planned. Gary, his brother Kit and Ged Grimes played an array of instruments while former ABC drummer David Palmer was retained from the debut album. But the band's classy sound had certainly not gone unnoticed across the pond, and Don Was, the esteemed Rolling Stones/Bob Dylan/Was Not Was producer, was very interested in working on *Bebop Moptop*. According to Gary: "He came to the studio, Inner City Sound in Dundee. We played him a few tunes and went out on the town. A lovely, talented and very cool gentleman. Schedules didn't pan out, though, and no more came of it. Ged suggested Fred Defaye as he'd been listening to Eurythmics' *Savage* album. We met and hit it off and pretty quickly decided to work together."

Ultimately, the majority of the album was recorded between July 1988 and April 1989 at the Virgin-owned Manor Studios in Oxfordshire and Dave Stewart's Church Studios in London's Crouch End. Under Defaye's influence, *Bebop Moptop* features a considerably more in-your-face, less spacious sound than *Meet Danny Wilson*, with guitars and drums much higher in the mix. This was very evident on lead-off single *The Second Summer Of Love*. It tapped into the 1989 zeitgeist (sample lyric: "Tell your angry friends to throw away their Gaultier and grow their hair again") and reached No.23 in the UK, the only Top 40 single from the album (*I Can't Wait* and *Never Gonna Be The Same* stalled at No.92 and No.69 respectively). ITV's *The Chart Show* loved the song but Terry Wogan didn't – according to Grimes, he wouldn't let them perform it on his chat show due to its references to acid and Jesus.

Bebop Moptop was a rather apt title for the album; Danny Wilson's brand of music could borrow from any style, from jazz to The Beatles. Gary: "You had three individuals all with very eclectic tastes contributing. We were very open in the creative process so nothing was off limits."

> "PRESSURE DOESN'T NECESSARILY COME FROM THE RECORD LABEL. IT COMES FROM YOUR OWN DESIRE TO BE COMPETITIVE, FROM MANAGEMENT, FROM PEERS." GARY CLARK

Danny Wilson's second album was released on 17 July 1989

★ ★

As such, the album can be interpreted as a kind of potted history of the modern song, from the Broadway-musical vibe of opener *Imaginary Girl*, through folky *The Second Summer Of Love*, sophisticated Steely Dan-influenced *The Ballad Of Me And Shirley MacLaine* and *Goodbye Shanty Town*. There's also the very 'British' pop of *I Was Wrong* and *I Can't Wait*, Pogues pastiche *NYC Shanty* and Prince-flavoured *Charlie Boy*. *Loneliness* reached even further back to Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, a queasy waltz with excellent lyrics ("Does loneliness reign when it snows?"). It's crying out for a Rufus Wainwright cover version.

BEBOP MOPTOP WAS A RATHER APT TITLE FOR THE ALBUM; DANNY WILSON'S BRAND OF MUSIC COULD BORROW FROM ANY STYLE, FROM JAZZ TO THE BEATLES

Elsewhere, traditional instrumentation (accordion, harmonica, glockenspiel) bumped up against state-of-the-art, late-80s technology to produce many striking musical grace notes. *If You Really Love Me (Let Me Go)* is made all the richer by its use of passing chords that reach back to pre-Beatles song forms, while the chorus of *Goodbye Shanty Town* rattles along with rhythm synths last heard on Donald Fagen's *New Frontier*. There's also a continuity to *Bebop Moptop*, emphasised by the neat reprise of *Imaginary Girl* at the end. "Pockets of songs were designed, almost like musical theatre, to live together," Gary explained. "My dad was really into *Guys And Dolls* and *On The Town*, so I grew up with that stuff."

Bebop Moptop's chart placing was an improvement on *Meet Danny Wilson*; it reached No.24 in the UK upon its July 1989 release, though perhaps not helped by touching down during the summer of The Stone Roses, Happy Mondays, De La Soul, Jason Donovan, Jive Bunny and acid house. Sophisti-pop was falling on hard times: Swing Out Sister, China Crisis, Curiosity Killed The Cat, Love And Money and Hue & Cry weren't selling what they had a few years earlier. However Q magazine loved it ("Can we please have the third album around this time next month?") and they were finally getting noticed by the *Melody Maker* and *NME*.

The band promoted *Bebop Moptop* with a British and European tour through the autumn and winter of 1989, and excellent material from the London Town & Country Club gig (note to Universal: release this live album…) was included on various single B-sides and on the *Sweet Danny Wilson* compilation of 1991.

A third studio album is yet to see the light of day. As Gary remembers: "We started the songwriting process and even recorded a few demos that became my solo album *Ten Short Songs About Love* but it became clear that everyone involved wanted a larger part of the writing and that would've meant me diminishing my input. It was the underlying source of unhappiness that ultimately came to a head and ended the band."

Still, if it's all over, the band have a near-perfect pair of studio albums, a couple of hits and an interesting bunch of B-sides as their legacy, even if they are completely absent from Terry Southern's otherwise exhaustive *A History Of Virgin Records* coffee table book. Gary: "I'm proud of what we achieved in a short period of time and miss the creative process of working with Ged and Kit, who were and are exceptionally talented people. If we had been able to take a break from living in each other's pockets, we might have been able to keep the band going in some capacity."

EMF, 2022-style

Q+A

EMF

FRONTMAN JAMES ATKIN TALKS RAVING IN THE YORKSHIRE DALES, HIS OTHER LIFE AS A SCHOOLTEACHER AND MEETING ALAN BENNETT DOWN THE SHOPS…

STEVE HARNELL

EMF – they of the knee-length shorts and clubcentric headgear – have been regulars on the live circuit for the past two decades after an initial split following third LP *Cha Cha Cha* in 1995. Now the band are solidifying their comeback with their first studio album in nigh-on three decades, *Go Go Sapiens*. Packed with party-starting bangers and the punk pop 'tude that made them famous, it's as if they've never been away. Unbelievable? Not in the slightest…

It's been 27 years since your last album, what prompted the return to the studio for the new LP?
It always felt inevitable, EMF wasn't something we were ready to put to bed just yet. In those 27 years we've all respectively gone off and lived our own very different lives, but it has never been the case that we've thought, "Oh I'm not in EMF anymore." It's a lifetime commitment and we're lucky to have something so positive in our lives.

Were you all working together in the same room on *Go Go Sapiens* or was it recorded remotely?
The initial writing sessions were conducted between my place in the Yorkshire Dales and Ian [Dench's] studio in Finsbury Park, quite a contrast in locations. By chance, we discovered this little hidden away recording studio in the next valley from mine in the Dales where we recorded the drums. We mixed the album at mine – the first single was mixed by our friends Vladimir Komarov and Atsuo Matsumoto in New York City. It feels like a true EMF album as we created it solely between us – it was actually completed, mastered and ready before anyone apart from Ian and myself had heard the finished product. Not sure that was healthy, but it definitely gave us the benefit of seeing our vision through without any outside influence.

You made the album without any record company assistance. Liberating or scary?
Both, but we live in a world now where being your own producer, record label, distributor etc is achievable. It's a little daunting but we have a fantastic team. There's very little pressure, it's just a joy to be able to share some new EMF songs without expectations and the need to be successful. Although it would be obviously nice if people dug it.

Give us an insight into the 2022 version of the band's sound. Have you reinvented yourselves or stuck to your essential EMF-ness?
I guess whatever we do is going to sound like us. We can't get away from Ian's unique guitar style, and once I'm singing on it, it automatically sounds just like an EMF record. We've still incorporated our synths and electronics, though.

There's a Happy Mondays-esque vibe to new album track *We Are The Free*. Do you feel any affiliation with the Madchester-era dance-rock bands?
I'm an old raver from the 90s. My wife badgers me with new music and, bless her, she tries to introduce me to happening stuff. I'm happy listening to my old New Order or Smiths records, so I guess that still comes through in the music we're making at present. We'd perhaps feel like frauds if we followed new trends and came out with some kind of urban grime album.

"THE DAYS OF GOING OUT CLUBBING ON A FRIDAY AND RETURNING HOME IN BITS ON A SUNDAY ARE WELL BEHIND US. HAVING THE ENERGY TO THROW SHAPES ALL NIGHT MIGHT BE PUSHING IT A BIT."

Johnny Marr recently told *Classic Pop* that it's harder to write bangers than ballads, but *Go Go Sapiens* closes with a top-drawer EMF dancefloor filler, *Sparks And Flashes*. Do you still keep in touch with your clubbing roots?
I wish! I still adore dance music and will quite happily listen to four-to-the-floor beats and techno basslines all day long. The days of going out clubbing on a Friday and returning home in bits on a Sunday are well behind us, though. I think I'd be a bit lost in a club now, having the energy to throw shapes all night might be pushing it a bit. The closest we get to raving these days is turning the PA up loud at home. Thankfully, there's only a few farmers about half a mile away that complain – they have several times you'll be glad to know.

***Unbelievable* shot you to instant fame. How did you cope with the success – did**

it come as a shock or did you manage to ride it out with your sanity intact?
That whole time was a whirlwind. Personally, it was all a bit overwhelming, I hadn't developed the tools to cope with it at such a young age. If I'd have had that success again, I'm sure I'd enjoy it a lot more. I kept it together mostly back then, I felt a certain responsibility being the frontman – being hungover, wasted and losing my voice wasn't an option. The other members of the band loved every moment, they partied hard and had a riot. I think I was just a little too self-conscious and not comfortable being a singer at that time. I shied away from any interviews and withdrew whenever I possibly could. It took me a long time to get over the experience. A few of the band members struggled and this led to them having difficulties adapting after all the madness. I think moving out of London, starting a family, going back to university, getting a degree and getting a normal job totally sorted me out. It grounded me and now my sanity is intact.

It's still got an incredible hook – did you know straight off the bat that it would be a hit?
Not particularly. Ian arrived with the song pretty well formed and had the vision of what it was going to be. The first batch of songs came very quickly. I'd catch the bus to Ian's mum's in Gloucester and we'd sit around a piano bouncing ideas around. *Unbelievable* just appeared from nowhere but quickly became a favourite amongst the fans at our first handful of gigs. Credit to Ian, he knows how to write a song.

If you had your time over again during that first era of EMF would you do anything differently?
Yes, enjoy it more, not take it so seriously, be firmer on direction and not succumb to other people's questionable ideas. We had a fantastic thing going on, but the momentum got derailed by people's negativity in the band. I wish I'd had the confidence to stand up to people when I was younger. Thankfully, Ian has always been a guiding light and we have developed deep mutual respect and love for each other.

You've had a parallel career outside of EMF as a school music teacher. Is studying EMF on your pupils' curriculum?
Ha! They are clueless to my past, it has no relevance to my students. It's kind of cool, though, and brings you back down to earth. Parents evenings can be funny when they make a beeline for you and ask for autographs. But even the parents are looking a bit young these days.

You've also been in Bentley Rhythm Ace and released solo albums...
I love playing with BRA, it came in my life just at the right time. I'd kept my shiz together for so many years singing with EMF, now I was in a band touring the world where it was the law to party hard, take drugs, be as rock'n'roll as possible, and never go to bed. The amount of shows we did where we'd been up all night from the gig the night before were legendary. We still go out and play now but have calmed down considerably. I love making music and have also released five solo LPs to date. I seem to have got a bit prolific since moving out of London. I have a simple studio set-up with no distractions, I'd happily spend every hour in there making records to my wife's dismay.

Left to right: EMF's guitarist Ian Dench, drummer Aid Todd and James Atkin

Tell us about the *Tonight Matthew...?* YouTube series of collabs you put together over the pandemic.
It was borne out of the need to still connect with people and musicians when that first lockdown hit and everyone's tours got cancelled. It grew from asking a few friends to contribute to pulling in people like Keith Allen and Rick Wakeman. I'm chuffed that I can now say I've worked with the likes of Horace Panter, Steel Pulse, Black Grape, Lindy Layton and UB40 as well as The Wonder Stuff, Space, 808 State, Leftfield, Jim Bob and many more. We raised a lot of funds for the Help Musicians Charity – at that time they were giving out grants to help fellow artists. It was nice to do something worthy and kept us occupied during those strange, uncertain times.

You're planning on hitting the road to promote *Go Go Sapiens*, right?
We're doing a small UK tour and a bunch of festivals. For the last 30 years we've always started the live set with the song *Children*, we now have a few new contenders as opening songs that we are rehearsing up. Thankfully, the new songs lend themselves to being played live.

Finally, have you seen your neighbour Alan Bennett down the shops recently?
Ha! Yes, often. It's always my wife who sparks up a conversation with him, usually about potatoes. ■

● ***Go Go Sapiens* is out now via EMF Records and reviewed on page 90**

© Getty

EMF's original incarnation pictured in 1991

POPARAZZI

READERS SHARE THEIR FAVOURITE PHOTOS AS THEY GET UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH SOME OF THE BIGGEST NAMES IN PLANET POP

Send your Poparazzi pics now to **steve.harnell@anthem.co.uk**

WENDY JAMES
WITH JODIE PAYNE

I met Wendy at her Clwb Ifor Bach gig in Cardiff last September as part of her rescheduled tour with The Wendy James Band. She's such a slight and demure character who then bursts into her rock star persona when performing her 80s Transvision Vamp hits and more recent self-penned material. It was really interesting to see an artist perform live who I've only ever seen in the pages of my *Smash Hits* magazines. It was a quality intimate gig and great to be part of an enthusiastic dancing crowd once again after lockdown. Wendy was so polite and welcoming after the gig, spending time with those of us who stopped by for a photo or a quick word.

RON MAEL
WITH MARTIN ROGER

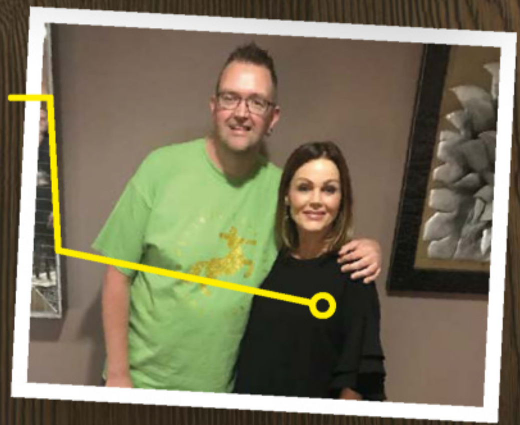
My wife Hanna and I happened to run into Ron when we were in Berlin in September 2015 for the Lollapalooza Festival. He was there with FFS. Ron was filming the Holocaust Memorial on his mobile phone when we walked by. We saw him and stopped, totally starstruck. We had a lovely chat with him and almost forgot to ask for a photo. One of our friends who is a hardcore Sparks fan told us that he has never been more envious in his life!

ALISON MOYET
WITH DAVID SIMPSON

Here I am at a meet-and-greet with Alison when she played at Fort Regent in Jersey in February 2019. It was an unusual venue to see Alison in – a sports complex right on top of a cliff edge – but great nonetheless and myself and a few pals all went over to the island to see the show. A good friend of mine, Steve Coats-Dennis, arranged for a pre-meet with Alison and a few fans as the tour was nearing its end. It's always a pleasure meeting Alison along the way on her tours, the gig itself was a stand up venue and that's always a bonus.

BELINDA CARLISLE
WITH JERRY KIRBELL

I'm pictured here with Belinda in Canberra, Australia, on her Runaway Horses 30th anniversary tour back in 2019. Belinda was as lovely as ever, and I begged her to return with the rest of The Go-Go's. This was part of a meet-and-greet arranged to raise money for her Animal People Alliance charity at Canberra's Southern Cross Club. A friend in the UK designed the T-shirt, which Belinda complimented me on. The show was amazing – it was so good to hear classic tracks from the *Runaway Horses* album done live, some for the first time. I've been a fan since 1987, with her Good Heavens tour being my second arena concert experience.



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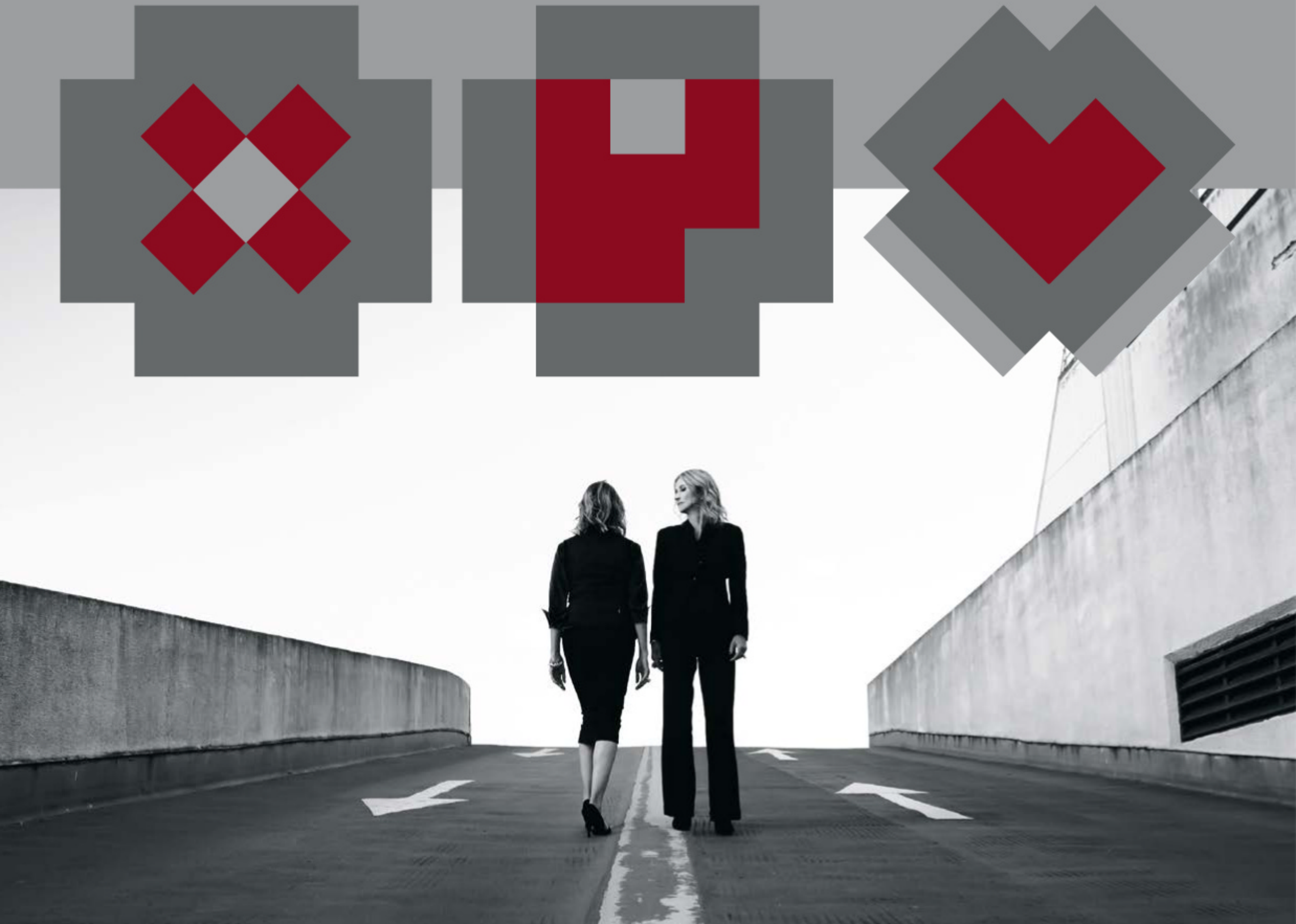


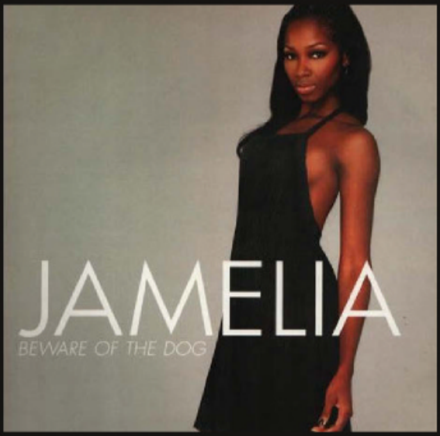
TOP 20

80s-SAMPLING HITS

MINING THE PAST TO MAKE THE MUSIC OF THE FUTURE, THESE SINGLES USED 80s SOURCES TO FINE EFFECT

JON O'BRIEN

From the prominence of the Fairlight CMI and the rise in turntablism to the chart-topping success of Paul Hardcastle's era-defining N-n-n-n-nineteen, the 80s was essentially where sampling culture began to take shape. By the end of the decade every producer with an eye on the charts was throwing in looped drum breaks and manipulated vocal hooks like they were going out of fashion. It was also an era in which the hitmakers of the 90s and beyond would repeatedly dive back into for inspiration. Here's a look at 20 chart smashes that have borrowed heavily, and wisely, from what had gone before.



20

JAMELIA

BEWARE OF THE DOG

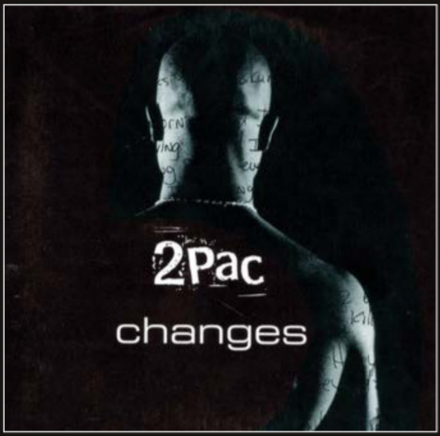
Stomping electro-pop beats, attitude-laden female vocals and an instantly familiar 80s sample from an iconic British synth-based outfit – on this occasion the twanging bluesy guitars from Depeche Mode's outlier *Personal Jesus*. The final of Jamelia's 10 UK Top 40 hits took inspiration from the mid-00s banger at No.16 on this list. Released just a few months later, *Beware Of The Dog* is arguably even more relentless in its production, exemplified by the promo in which the singer is whizzed around in a London taxi cab at breakneck speed.

19

PROFESSOR GREEN

I NEED YOU TONIGHT

Having barely caused a ripple with his The Streets-approved brand of Brit-hop, Professor Green made much more noticeable waves by going full-on pop. *I Need You Tonight*'s inspired sample – the irresistible guitar hook from INXS's signature tune – undoubtedly played a major part in its No.3 peak. But the colourful rapper also stamped his own playful mark with some self-effacing rhymes ("My pride, I'm tryna find it/ But ain't seen it, I'm an eejit") about a girl that got away, in turn abandoning all pretence he was a Michael Hutchence-esque lothario.

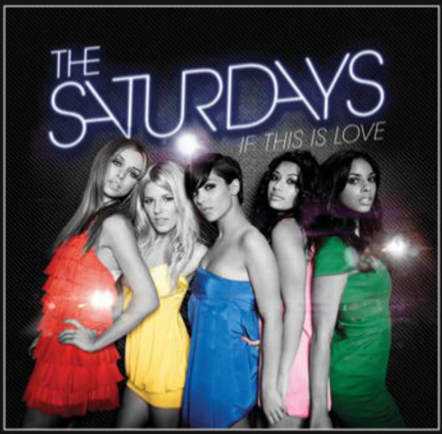


18

2PAC

CHANGES

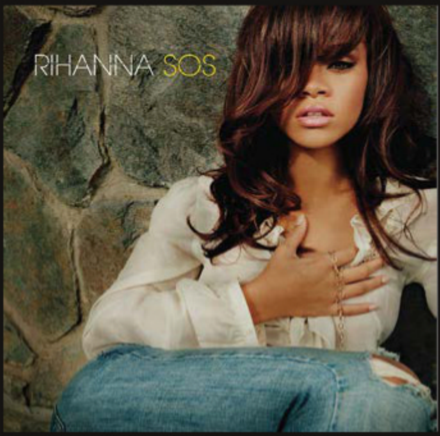
Tupac Shakur famously scored more hits as a posthumous artist than a living one. *Changes* was the seventh UK Top 40 single achieved after the rapper was murdered. And up until Elton John duet *Ghetto Gospel* it was his biggest. Tupac's sermon-like delivery pulled few punches, addressing everything from police brutality to America's War on Drugs. But by sampling both the melancholic piano hook and chorus from Bruce Hornsby And The Range's *The Way It Is*, the state of the nation address became a daytime radio staple.



17

THE SATURDAYS
IF THIS IS LOVE

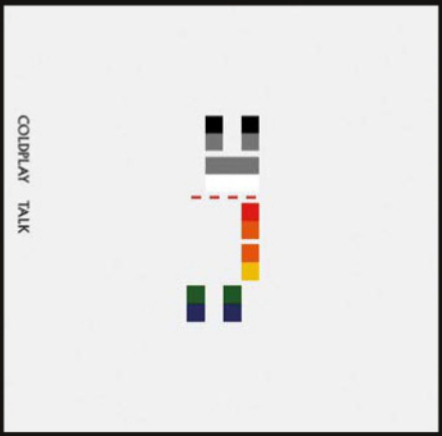
The Saturdays regularly dipped into the decade they were far too young to remember, covering both Evelyn King's *Love Come Down* and Depeche Mode's *Just Can't Get Enough* during their seven-year career. They also burst onto the scene with a more subtle nod to another Vince Clarke-penned number, with 2008 debut single *If This Is Love* lifting the bubbling synth hook from Yazoo's B-side, *Situation*. At a time when Sugababes were imploding, *If This Is Love* positioned Frankie, Rochelle and co. as their most obvious girlband successors.



16

RIHANNA
SOS

It's easy to forget that Rihanna was once in danger of succumbing to the same short-lived fate as Cassie, Amerie and countless other singular-named female R&B talents in the mid-00s. 2006 comeback single *SOS*, however, propelled her into the big league that she's remained in ever since. The Barbadian might not possess a powerhouse voice, but she still sounds every inch the superstar on an energetic girl-meets-boy tale underpinned by those glorious synth stabs and mechanical rhythms from Soft Cell's *Tainted Love*.



15

COLDPLAY
TALK

While much of *X&Y* was Coldplay on autopilot, its third single *Talk* did prove that the band often pilloried for playing it safe could be more adventurous than their peers. We don't remember the similarly uncool Keane, Travis or Snow Patrol, for example, ever sampling Kraftwerk. And it wasn't even one of the Germans' more familiar tunes that Jonny Buckland took his chiming guitar riff from either. *Computer Love* only reached No.36 in 1981 before returning to the charts just months later as one-half of a double A-side with *The Model*.

14

CHICANE
SALTWATER

Theme From Harry's Game, Clannad's haunting musical contribution to the ITV series about The Troubles, doesn't sound like an obvious starting point for an Ibiza classic. But Nick Bracegirdle, who's since worked his magic on another early 80s hit, Paul Young's *Come Back And Stay*, proved that chillout trance and Celtic new age can make for a surprisingly effective sunset soundtrack. Moya Brennan was so enamoured with the idea that she recorded new vocals for *Saltwater* which deservedly became Chicane's first Top 10 single at the height of the Balearics scene.

13

SAMANTHA MUMBA
BODY II BODY

David Bowie proved to be an unexpectedly popular inspiration for the female *Smash Hits* stars of the early 00s. Rachel Stevens lifted the twanging guitars from *Andy Warhol* for her 2003 single *Funky Dory* and three years earlier Samantha Mumba paid homage to the Thin White Duke by borrowing pretty much the entire backing of his 1980 No.1 *Ashes To Ashes* single. The Irish pop princess' unlikely tribute was more effective, her husky tones helping to transform a drug-addled nursery rhyme into a sleek and seductive turn-of-the-century R&B anthem.

12

SIMPLY RED
SUNRISE

After several years in the chart wilderness, Simply Red bounced back in 2003 with one of the finest singles of their career. The first release from Mick Hucknall's very own record label, *Sunrise* borrowed the twinkling piano hooks from Hall & Oates' No.8 hit *I Can't Go For That (No Can Do)*. But thanks to Mick Hucknall's breezy vocal and a suitably sun-drenched video filmed just outside Rio de Janeiro, it deservedly bettered the original's peak by one place. Manchester's finest blue-eyed soulers have never sounded so effortlessly cool.

11

DARIO G
SUNCHYME

Dario G's debut single had the misfortune to be released just a week after Elton John's Princess Diana tribute had sparked a record shop rush best described as maniacal. Otherwise, Crewe's ultimate dance trio would undoubtedly have taken the title of 1997's most joyous No.1. Combining the tribal-like chants from The Dream Academy's *Life In A Northern Town* with steel drums, piano hooks and an African-shot video featuring a bunch of dancers dressed as wild animals, *Sunchyme* brought some much-needed cheer to a nation in mourning.

10

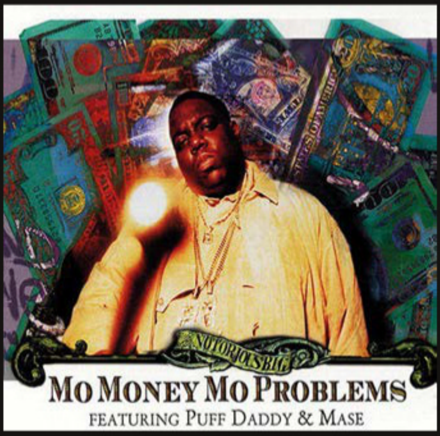
THE TAMPERER FEATURING MAYA
IF YOU BUY THIS RECORD YOUR LIFE WILL BE BETTER

Sandwiched in-between their hits sampling The Jackson 5's *Can You Feel It* and ABBA's *Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!*, the brilliantly-titled second single from The Tamperer saw the Italian producers and regular partner-in-crime Maya switch their attention to another iconic pop name. *If You Buy This Record Your Life Will Be Better* was incredibly the first time that Madonna had officially allowed another artist to raid her back catalogue, resulting in a camp dance-pop nod to *Material Girl*.

09

STRIKE
U SURE DO

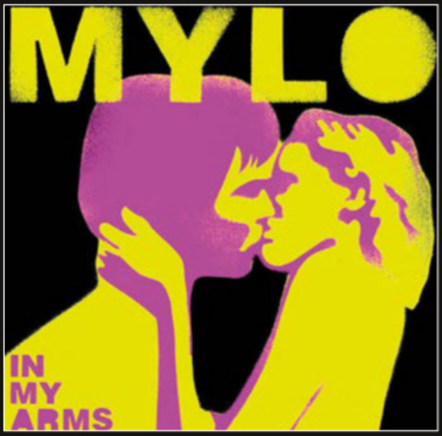
Strike, aka British producers Matt Cantor and Andy Gardner plus Aussie vocalist Victoria Newton, scored one of the most uplifting club crossover hits of the mid-90s (at the second time of asking) with *U Sure Do*. But many who danced around their Louis Vuittons to the No.4 single might have been unaware its powerhouse vocal hook was lifted from an 80s freestyle classic. Yes, alongside the gleaming synths from Cubic 22's *Night In Motion*, the crate-digging trio also looked towards the chorus from Donna Allen's debut *Serious* for inspiration.



08

THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G. FEAT. PUFF DADDY AND MASE
MO MONEY MO PROBLEMS

Released just weeks after the East/West Coast feud reached its inevitably tragic conclusion, Puff Daddy's *I'll Be Missing You* felt just as much a cynical cash grab as a heartfelt tribute to a lost friend. However, his second 80s-sampling hit of 1997 showed why The Notorious B.I.G. was held in such high regard. With his booming voice and slick lyrical flow, the late rapper positively commands attention over an inspired snatch of Diana Ross' joyous post-disco classic *I'm Coming Out*.



07

MYLO
IN MY ARMS

Remember that strange period in the mid-00s when seemingly every soft rock hit of the 80s was repurposed as a Ministry Of Sound banger? Boy Meets Girl's *Waiting For A Star To Fall* even found itself returning to the charts on three occasions in the space of six months. But while Cabin Crew and Sunset Strippers simply slapped a generic dance beat over the original chorus, Scottish producer Mylo thought outside the box, dreamily interweaving just a vocal snippet with the glorious synth hook from another one-hit wonder, Kim Carnes' *Bette Davis Eyes*.

06

PRAS FEAT. OL' DIRTY BASTARD AND MÝA
GHETTO SUPASTAR

Although regarded as the lesser of the three Fugees, Pras Michel's debut still stands up to the best of bandmates Wyclef Jean and Lauryn Hill. Admittedly, his rhymes are only the third greatest thing on it. Yes, the rapper is overshadowed by both a typically crazed verse from Ol' Dirty Bastard, the Wu-Tang Clan member who only ended up on the track by gate-crashing its recording, and a sweetly-sung chorus which sees Mýa offer a more streetwise update of Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton's *Islands In The Stream*.

05

UTAH SAINTS
SOMETHING GOOD

Utah Saints were pretty much the rave masters of the 80s sample. Each of their early 90s Top 10 hits borrowed heavily from the decade before, with Eurythmics' *There Must Be An Angel* and Gwen Guthrie's *Ain't Nothin' Goin' On But The Rent* forming the backbone of *What Can You Do For Me* and Human League's *Love Action* laying the foundations for *Believe In Me*. The duo's crowning glory, though, was turning Kate Bush into a dancefloor diva, with her ethereal vocals from *Cloudbusting* chopped and screwed to perfection on *Something Good*.

04

GEORGE MICHAEL
FASTLOVE

Beating Will Smith's *Men In Black* to the punch by a good 18 months, George Michael's *Fastlove* was the slickest, sexiest and by far the most soulful mid-90s track to recycle the cooing chorus from Patrice Rushen's *Forget Me Nots*. The second of a remarkable six straight Top 3 hits provided a refreshing change of pace from the mournful ballads that dominated comeback album *Older*. Middle America was completely oblivious to the fact that in among all the seductive basslines and sleek R&B grooves, Michael was celebrating his love of cruising.

03

MARIAH CAREY
FANTASY

Mariah Carey's transition from power balladeer to R&B diva essentially began with her 10th US No.1 and a Talking Heads side project played a major part in its success. *Fantasy* is heavily based on *Genius Of Love*, the new wave funk classic from Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth's Tom Tom Club that has since become a go-to sample for countless hip-hop names. Carey borrows everything from its flirtatious synths to its loved-up bridge on a near-flawless summer classic even those immune to her previous glass-shattering vocals found impossible to resist.

02

PM DAWN
SET ADRIFT ON MEMORY BLISS

Spandau Ballet's catalogue has been mined by several suspects over the years. Rui da Silva transformed *Chant No.1* into an actual No.1 on deep house classic *Touch Me*, while a decade earlier hip-hop duo PM Dawn took inspiration from *True*. "Like being massaged by a bag of marsh-mallows," read *Smash Hits*' review of *Set Adrift On Memory Bliss* back in 1991. And with Prince Be's sweet stream-of-consciousness rhymes softly pillowing up against the gentle guitar plucks of the London soul boys, that's a perfectly accurate description.

01

M.I.A.
PAPER PLANES

One of those rare examples of a cult artist's commercial peak matching their creative one. *Paper Planes* was practically inescapable in the late 00s, elevating key scenes in *Pineapple Express* and *Slumdog Millionaire*, picking up a Record Of The Year Grammy Award nod and giving M.I.A. (real name: Mathangi Arulpragasam) her only real crossover chart hit. Alongside co-producer Diplo, the pop provocateur threw in everything but the kitchen sink: playful cash register and gunshot sound effects, nursery rhyme melodies from a gang of Brixton street kids and Jamaican patois, not forgetting nods to hip-hop, African folk and post-punk. The latter, of course, derived from the screeching guitars and skank reggae riffs from *Straight To Hell*, the lesser-known other half of The Clash's 1982 double A-side featuring *Should I Stay Or Should I Go*. *Paper Planes* also shares its themes of immigration, although instead of lamenting abandoned Vietnam war kids, M.I.A. takes aim at Uncle Sam's general prejudice against the Third World (the Sri Lankan refugee was having trouble obtaining a work visa at the time). It's a burst of pure organised chaos which proved that few can combine pop and politics with such thrilling results.

Cocteau Twins (left to right: Simon Raymonde, Elizabeth Fraser, Robin Guthrie)

© Getty

Dreampop

YOUR AT-A-GLANCE GUIDE TO SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE SUB-GENRES

WE LOSE OURSELVES IN THE HAZY SONIC TEXTURES OF DREAMPOP, THAT MOST PAINTERLY OF MUSICAL GENRES…

STEVE O'BRIEN

What is it?

With dreampop the clue is in the word 'dream'. This is music to immerse yourself in, to take a long warm bath in. It's music that carries you gently from the real world to another, more abstract and ethereal place. In the case of dreampop figureheads Cocteau Twins, that place can be tranquil and balmy, with My Bloody Valentine it can be intense and threatening. There are elements of psychedelia in dreampop, but the emphasis is on sonic textures, not melodies. It's ambient, with pop flourishes.

Common characteristics include fuzzy guitars, breathy, multi-tracked vocals and introspective lyrics. Expect plenty of reverb and echo, too. Dreampop can be downbeat or upbeat – it can take you up or bring you down. Often at the same time.

Musically, its origins lie in the thick sonic soup that was Phil Spector's Wall of Sound, though there are hints of dreampop in some of The Byrds' acid-fuelled experiments and the delicacy of Vini Reilly's Durutti Column. Also check out The Beach Boys' *All I Wanna Do*, from 1970's *Sunflower* LP, which sounds 20 years ahead of its time.

Dreampop's heyday may have been in the 80s but it's still out there, with bands such as Chromatics and Beach House still flying the flag for hazy, transportative pop music.

Essential songs

THE BEACH BOYS ALL I WANNA DO (1970)

THIS MORTAL COIL SONG TO THE SIREN (1983)

FALLING JULEE CRUISE (1989)

COCTEAU TWINS CHERRY-COLOURED FUNK (1990)

MAZZY STAR FADE INTO YOU (1994)

Essential albums

A.R. KANE 69 (1988)
GALAXIE 500 TODAY (1988)
COCTEAU TWINS HEAVEN OR LAS VEGAS (1990)
MAZZY STAR SO TONIGHT THAT I MIGHT SEE (1993)
SIGUR RÓS ( ) (2002)

What they say

"An atmospheric subgenre of alternative rock that relies on sonic textures as much as melody."
The AllMusic Guide To Electronica

"[Dreampop] celebrates rapturous and transcendent experiences, often using druggy and mystical imagery.... After 12 years of Conservative government in Britain, any idealism or constructive political involvement seems futile to these alienated middle-class dropouts."
New York Times, 1991

"As a genre term, dreampop embodies some of the same characteristics as the music it describes: it's hazy, ever-shifting, often undefinable and yet somehow distinctly recognisable."
Long Live Vinyl

Essential bands

This Mortal Coil

Dreampop's sole 'supergroup', This Mortal Coil were started by 4AD label boss Ivo Watts-Russell in 1983 alongside producer John Fryer. Though they were the only two official members, the collective had a revolving door of guest artists, including Cocteau Twins' Elizabeth Fraser and Robin Guthrie as well as various members of Cindytalk, Dead Can Dance, Colourbox, The Wolfgang Press, Breathless and Modern English. "The idea," states the 4AD website, "was to allow artists the creative freedom to record material outside of the realm of what was expected of them; it also created the opportunity for innovative cover versions of songs personal to Ivo."

Cocteau Twins

The quintessential dreampop band, Cocteau Twins were formed in 1979 by Robin Guthrie and Will Heggie. It wasn't until 1981, however, and the arrival of the honey-voiced Elizabeth Fraser and later multi-instrumentalist Simon Raymonde (replacing Heggie) that Cocteau Twins became the group we know. Fraser's shimmering vocals, often singing words you needed a *Smash Hits* lyrics sheet to understand, sat atop Guthrie's shivery guitars and Raymonde's growling bass to create music of transcendent beauty. Sadly, they split in 1997, after the breakdown of Fraser and Guthrie's relationship.

FAST FACT: The band were named after the Johnny And The Self-Abusers (later to become Simple Minds) song *The Cocteau Twins* (itself later to be retitled *No Cure*).

A.R. Kane

Though A.R. Kane remains one of the lesser heralded dreampop outfits, it's said that it was singer Alex Ayuli who first coined the term itself. Formed in 1986 by Ayuli with former schoolmate Rudy Tambala they were first inspired by seeing Cocteau Twins on television. "They had no drummer," Tambala recalled to *The Guardian*. "They used tapes and technology and Liz Fraser looked completely otherworldly with those big eyes. And the noise coming out of Robin [Guthrie]'s guitar! That was the 'Fuck! We could do that! We could express ourselves like that!' moment." Three albums followed – *69* (Indie Chart No.1), *"i"* and *New Clear Child* – until they split in 1994. Later bands such as Slowdive, Dubstar and Apollo Heights have all cited A.R. Kane as an influence.

My Bloody Valentine

Imagine the ethereal beauty of Cocteau Twins with the cold-eyed aggression of the Jesus & Mary Chain – that's the sound that My Bloody Valentine have perfected over the course of their nearly 40-year-long career. Formed in 1983 by Kevin Shields and Colm Ó Cíosóig, they took their name from a 1981 Canadian slasher film. The band signed to Creation in 1988 and later that year released their debut long-player, *Isn't Anything* ("the first full-length expression of this remarkable new sound: gossamer vocals and insinuating melodies glimpsed through sheets of blurred, opaque noise," enthused Stuart Maconie in *Q*). The classic *Loveless* followed in 1991, but Creation dropped them shortly after. Just one more studio album has surfaced since then, 2013's *m b v*, though Shields keeps promising more material.

© Getty

Essential reading

The First Time I Heard… Cocteau Twins by Scott Heim

Related genres

Shoegazing, chillwave, ambient, slowcore, noise pop

SUPER FAN

DEVOTED FANS SHOW US THEIR COLLECTIONS AND POP MEMORABILIA

GEORGE MICHAEL
SAF SATHI
KENT

Q When did you first become a Superfan of George Michael?

A Ever since hearing Wham's second single, *Young Guns (Go For It)*. The song and the video got me hooked. I've loved George's songwriting talent and have a lot of admiration for the way that he was able to change his image over the years.

Q What items do you have in your collection?

A The full UK discography of Wham! plus George's solo work in every format. I also have Japanese releases as well as those from various other countries worldwide.

Q How much have you spent on it over the years?

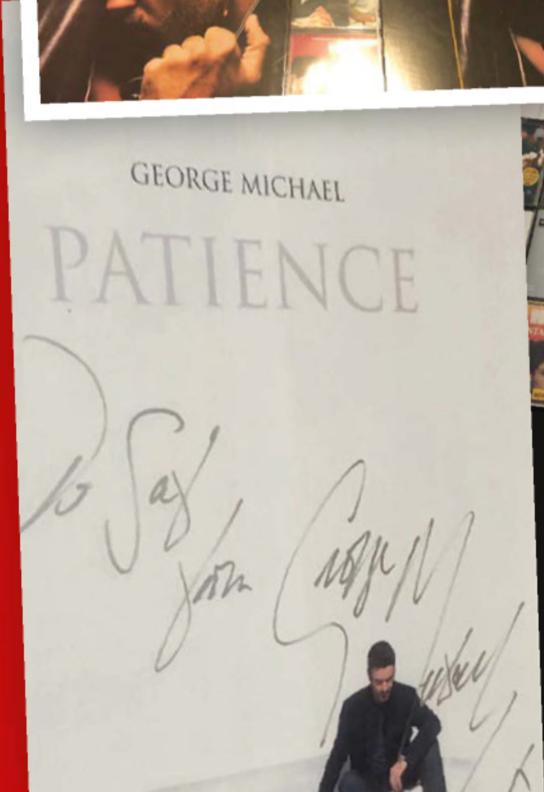
A I wouldn't like to add up how much I've spent, but it's certainly in the thousands.

Q What's your favourite item in the collection?

A I have several favourites, but if I had to choose just one it would be the Olympic figurine of George that was made by Funkster for the Official George Michael Fan Club. The set was limited to just 50 figurines and I managed to get hold of No.14.

Q Did you ever get to meet George in person?

A I met him outside his home in Highgate in 2013 – it was such a memorable day. As the front door and gate opened, before I could say anything, George asked me if I wanted to get a photo. He told me to give my phone to his boyfriend who took the shot. I had a Blackberry at the time and George told me, "Get an iPhone!" so I went out and bought one the next day. George also commented on my beard being the same as his. I asked him how he was after his recent bout of pneumonia and he replied that was he fine and on the mend. I just couldn't believe it, I'd met my idol and he was so nice and friendly.



AND FINALLY...

Q Is there one Holy Grail item of memorabilia that you'd love to get your hands on?

A It would have to be George's greatest hits Japanese promo CD.

THE WATERBOYS
ALL SOULS HILL
The new album - CD & Digital 6th May
LP 24th June
LIVE
Black Deer Festival, 18th June
Glastonbury, 25th June
For all live dates visit www.mikescottwaterboys.com

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02 JUNE HOLMFIRTH PICTUREDROME
03 JUNE GATESHEAD SAGE
04 JUNE MANCHESTER RNCM
06 JUNE EDINBURGH QUEEN'S HALL
07 JUNE HULL CITY HALL
09 JUNE MILTON KEYNES STABLES*
10 JUNE SOUTHEND PALACE THEATRE
11 JUNE BURY ST EDMUNDS APEX
14 JUNE WIMBORNE TIVOLI THEATRE
16 JUNE BASINGSTOKE ANVIL ARTS
17 JUNE GUILDFORD G LIVE*
18 JUNE LONDON ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALLS*
23 JUNE SWINDON WYVERN THEATRE
24 JUNE BIRMINGHAM TOWN HALL
A portion of the proceeds from each show will be donated to Hazel to help with her ongoing recovery
*Saffron will not appear at these shows
toyahwillcox.com
lenelovich.net
republicamusic.co.uk
RLN MUSIC
See TICKETS

"I FEEL CREATIVELY LIKE I'VE COME BACK TO LIFE AGAIN"

AS HE RELEASES HIS FIRST SOLO RETROSPECTIVE, DARYL HALL TALKS TO CLASSIC POP ABOUT RECORD LABEL WOES, SUPERSTAR HOOK-UPS AND LIFE WITHOUT OATES

JON O'BRIEN

From Hall & Oates' perennial radio staples to Paul Young's US chart-topper *Every Time You Go Away*, Daryl Hall has penned so many hits across the past half-century of pop that it's entirely understandable he'd forget about at least a few. "I can't even remember the name of that one," the soulman admits when the subject of co-writing for Celine Dion comes up in his interview with *Classic Pop*.

Of course, Hall has kept many of his finest compositions entirely for himself, as is evident on *BeforeAfter*, a new two-disc retrospective which shines the spotlight on his underrated body of solo work.

Speaking from his New York home, Daryl notes that despite recording 18 albums with guitarist John Oates, he's always considered himself as a solo artist: "John and I decided when we first came together as kids that we were both going to share the stage. And that's really the way that both of us have treated our careers. I've worked with John and I'm proud of all those songs that I've written for Hall & Oates... But I'm also very proud of all the other work that I've done."

Hall first broke away from his regular collaborative partner after fifth LP, *Bigger Than Both Of Us*, spawned their first of six Stateside No.1s, *Rich Girl*. Sadly, record company interference – RCA believed it lacked any commercial appeal – meant that 1977's solo LP *Sacred Songs* didn't get a release for another three years. Understandably, the Rock & Roll Hall Of Famer still feels aggrieved at how his debut album, which although more experimental was hardly a million miles away from his day job, was treated.

"It was a rough time back then," Hall admits. "There were a lot of gatekeepers, a lot of people who had power over what came into the world. It wasn't like it is now. We just put something out online and get to people in many different ways. These people were invested in another concept at the time. So Robert and I took matters into our own hands."

The 'Robert' who helped Hall to build word-of-mouth among both fans and the record industry is, of course, the man who also laid the foundations of British prog rock. King Crimson linchpin Robert Fripp, who'd served as *Sacred Songs*' producer, would later invite Hall to guest on his own first solo affair, 1979's *Exposure*. In fact, the pair worked together on most of the album before RCA, concerned that such a freewheeling listen would damage the Hall & Oates brand, once again stuck their oar in and ultimately limited their efforts.

Guitarist Robert Fripp was one of Daryl Hall's first collaborators

© Getty

Thankfully, these lost recordings would eventually see the light of day on a 2006 reissue. But Hall understandably remains frustrated at being so creatively stifled by the men in suits: "They were invested in Hall & Oates and didn't want me to be successful because they didn't own [*Exposure*]. When I did all the songs with Robert they suddenly decided they're going to pull some fucking bullshit and say I was only allowed to put two songs on the album. I had done six or seven. So what Robert had to do was to find other vocals, which we'd totally spontaneously created. So it was very angering."

However, such meddling didn't deter Fripp from wanting to further his working relationship with Hall. In fact, he wanted to muscle in on Oates' territory full-time. "Yeah, after all this, he said, 'Why don't we just form a band?' What became for him The League Of Gentlemen. It was so conflicting for me at the time because I had just made this record *Voices* with John. And it became wildly successful. It was just the wrong thing to do at the time."

With *Private Eyes*, *H_2O* and *Big Bam Boom* further establishing his duo's imperial phase, Hall put any solo ambitions on the backburner before joining forces with another musical maverick, Dave Stewart, for his belated 1986 sophomore, *Three Hearts In The Happy Ending Machine*. On this occasion, RCA had much greater faith in Hall without Oates, something rewarded with a US Top 40 placing and a No.5 single,

Dreamtime. And Hall tells us that another album co-penned and co-produced by the Eurythmics co-founder is on the way: "Just recently I came back from the Bahamas where Dave has a house now and a studio. We just wrote songs together. So this is a continuing relationship." When asked how the record is progressing, the 75-year-old responds: "It's coming along fine. We're in the early stages. I'm in the midst of doing some other things and then we're gonna come back to it. Something will come out of this."

Indeed, even when striking out on his own, Daryl has always been keen to harness his collaborative spirit. And often with artists you might not necessarily expect (see boxout). Check the credits of 1993's *Soul Alone* and you'll see a certain Mariah Carey listed as co-writer of *Help Me Find A Way To Your Heart*. Hall recalls how he was blown away after being introduced to her voice by their shared manager, and Carey's future husband, Tommy Mottola.

He also has fond memories of working with the legendary Dusty Springfield on *Wherever Would I Be*, a Cheap Trick cover which became a minor hit in 1995: "She was such a nice person, that's the best word I could use. It's such a cliché to say the least but she really was. She was a great singer. She was just a cool person, really cool."

© Getty

Mariah Carey worked with Hall in 1993

Perhaps the best example of Hall's team player mentality, though, is his phenomenally successful web series *Live From Daryl's House*. Since its premiere in 2007, the singer-songwriter has invited everyone from his own inspirations (Smokey Robinson) to his peers (Kenny Loggins) to those he inspired (Chromeo) to jam at either his Millerton home or Pawling club. And the host with the most seems prouder of its success than any of his other countless achievements.

"It's so different than everything else that I've done. It employs what I consider to be my best quality which is the spontaneity of improvisation. I'm a natural collaborator. I love interacting with people. Every show is a surprise because it's all happening in the moment.

"We don't rehearse so some people that you think are going to be really brilliant are more wary. Some people who you think have a reputation for being wary are the most open people in the world. We never know what's going to happen. It's a really enlightening experience."

Daryl hopes that the show, which last aired in 2020, will return to our screens in the near future: "It's not a cheap thing to do. But I'm determined to bring it back into the world again." And expect supergroup Silk Sonic to receive an invitation once it does.

When asked about which current artists have his seal of approval, Hall enthuses: "I have to say that I like what Anderson .Paak and Bruno Mars are doing right now because they might as well call themselves The Delfonics. That's where I come from."

Hall has selected six of his most cherished duets from the series on *BeforeAfter*, including *Can We Still Be Friends* featuring upcoming support act Todd Rundgren. The pair kicked off a tour of the US in April, a show which Hall hopes he'll eventually be able to bring across the other side of the Atlantic.

So was there anything in particular that inspired Hall to go down the nostalgia route in 2022? "I treat my solo material the same way I treat all Hall & Oates material. I've been aware of these songs and Sony said, 'Why don't you just put them out and

"I LIKE WHAT ANDERSON .PAAK AND BRUNO MARS ARE DOING RIGHT NOW BECAUSE THEY MIGHT AS WELL CALL THEMSELVES THE DELFONICS"

Hall Of Fame

5 UNEXPECTED DARYL HALL COLLABORATIONS

5 B-LEGIT
GHETTO SMILE

Is there any genre that Hall can't adapt to? The soulman's name may have stuck out like a sore thumb on the credits to West Coast rapper B-Legit's 1996 sophomore *The Hemp Museum* yet his retooling of Hall & Oates' breakthrough hit *Sara Smile* worked surprisingly well alongside the Tupac cohort's rhymes.

4 KENNY G
BABY COME TO ME

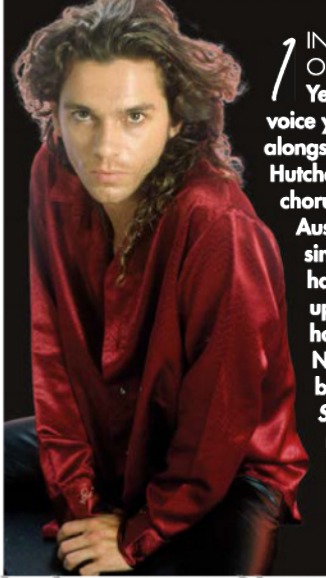
Hall is no stranger to the saxophone solo. But in 2004 he essentially found himself competing with the instrument on Kenny G's star-studded *At Last…* Hall's impassioned vocal just about won the battle on a cocktail bar-friendly cover of Patti Austin and James Ingram's *Baby Come To Me*.

3 GYM CLASS HEROES
LIVE FOREVER (FLY WITH ME)

A year after embarking on a tour titled Daryl Hall For President, Gym Class Heroes nabbed their candidate of choice for 2008 fourth album *The Quilt*. They made sure they got their money's worth, too, on a seven-minute alt-hip-hop-rock epic.

2 NERO
REACHING OUT

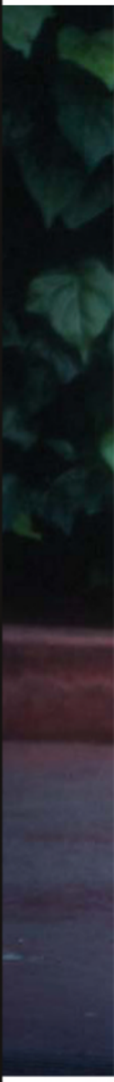
Hall returned to the Radio One playlist in 2011 after joining forces with another chart-topping duo, Nero. The 80s-tinged dubstep of *Reaching Out* was originally only supposed to sample Hall & Oates' *Out Of Touch*. However, the singer was so intrigued by the wobble bass sound that he offered to record an entirely new anthemic vocal.



© Alamy

1 INXS
ORIGINAL SIN

Yes, that's Hall's voice you can hear alongside Michael Hutchence in the chorus for INXS's first Australian No.1. The singer-songwriter had been called upon at the eleventh hour by producer Nile Rodgers who believed *Original Sin* needed a little more star power to really pop.



One of the earliest publicity photos of Hall & Oates, 1970

truly do treat it that way'… I thought it would be a good time to do it and just bring it to the forefront."

Daryl admits that it wasn't particularly hard to narrow down which songs made the cut ("They sort of presented themselves. It was a fairly easy editing job"). But he did want to represent each solo album equally, meaning that both 1996's *Can't Stop Dreaming* – which only hit shelves in the States seven years later – and long-awaited 2011 follow-up *Laughing Down Crying* get just as much of a look-in on the comp as his chart-bothering days.

One track you won't find on there, however, is *Gloryland*, Hall's official theme for the 1994 USA World Cup he also performed at that famous Diana Ross, penalty-missing opening ceremony. Yet this doesn't mean Daryl regrets aligning himself with the beautiful game: "I can't remember how I was asked to do it. It was a surprise and certainly was out of character. But it was fun to do. I enjoyed it."

Nevertheless, the likes of Alexi Lalas didn't exactly ignite a passion for all things soccer: "I'm not a gigantic sports fan. I'll watch [American] football occasionally, especially with my stepson. But you know, it's not something that consumes me."

Hall might not be particularly au fait with the offside rule but he does have passions outside music. In 2014, he hosted DIY Network show *Daryl's Restoration Over-Hall* which allowed him to showcase his love of home renovation and preservation. And then there's the occasional foray into acting: he's played himself in everything from Adam Sandler comedy *Pixels* to inspired Helen Mirren-fronted spoof *Documentary Now!*

So could Hall & Oates ever get the all-singing biopic treatment à la *Bohemian Rhapsody* or *Rocketman*? Directors Christopher Miller and Phil Lord recently expressed interest in immortalising their life story on screen for real after fashioning a brief spoof for Apple TV+ hit *The Afterparty*. Daryl seems unconvinced: "I don't know. Because it doesn't have an ending yet. But I never say never."

Nor is Hall likely to follow in the footsteps of his bandmate and release a memoir, well not a straightforward one anyway: "What I would do would be an anecdotal one where I just talk about experiences and things that happened to me. Not chronological. But I feel like you really want to listen to my music. My lyrics explain better than I can explain myself."

The currently Oates-less Daryl Hall

© Lora Karem

Sadly for Hall & Oates fans, there's unlikely to be any new music any time soon, either. Although he announced plans for their 19th studio album back in 2020, Hall tells us that two years on he has different priorities. "I had sort of a pre-pandemic idea. But things change. And I'm more interested in just pursuing my own thing right now."

Indeed, with a new run of shows, retrospective and album on the way, Hall is currently firing on all cylinders as a solo artist, something which isn't lost on the man himself: "I did a Hall & Oates tour last Fall. Then I started working on what the new project is. I feel creatively like I've come back to life again." ■

● ***BeforeAfter* by Daryl Hall is out now via Legacy and reviewed on page 98**

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The power of kindness

xPropaganda's sublime new album *The Heart Is Strange* is reviewed on page 87

THE HOT LIST 86
Sun's Signature, ABBA, New Order, Teenage Fanclub, The Step

NEW RELEASES 87
xPropaganda, Liam Gallagher, Dubstar, The Waterboys, Bruce Hornsby, UB40 Featuring Ali Campbell & Astro, Everything Everything, EMF, Wet Leg, John Illsley, Ann Wilson, Interlopers, Def Leppard, Blossoms, Colin Hay, Röyksopp, Kula Shaker, Belle And Sebastian, Wallis Bird, Held By Trees, Bloc Party, The Chameleons, Roger Eno, Fader, C Duncan, Michael Head & The Red Elastic Band

REISSUES 94
The Associates/Billy Mackenzie, Rick Astley, Sparks, Go West, The Police, NOW compilations, Kraftwerk, Daryl Hall & John Oates, Madness, Toyah, Marc Almond, Girls At Our Best!, Foreigner, XTC, Penguin Cafe, *Song Education 3*, En Vogue, Fashion, *Generation Blitz 2*, Al Jarreau

LIVE 103
Susanne Vega, Echo & The Bunnymen

BOOKS 105
Baptism Of Fire by Ian Little; *Here They Come With Their Make Up On: Suede, Coming Up… And More Adventures Beyond The Wild Frontiers* by Jane Savidge; *My Life In Pictures* by Tony Hadley; *David Bowie: All The Songs – The Story Behind Every Track* by Benoît Clerc

RATINGS

EXCELLENT ★★★★★
VERY GOOD ★★★★
AVERAGE ★★★
PATCHY ★★
POOR ★

THE HOT LIST

WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT ON CLASSIC POP ZOOM CATCH-UPS

STEVE HARNELL

1 SUN'S SIGNATURE

SUN'S SIGNATURE EP

Elizabeth Fraser's first new music in 13 years comes via the Sun's Signature project with partner Damon Reece. Their self-titled five-song EP arrives on 18 June via Partisan Records with a digital release to follow in July. Lead track *Golden Air* is available now as a taster.

The pair explain that the first germs of the ideas date back as far as Cocteau Twins' split in 1997 and embryonic versions of the songs were debuted at the ANOHNI-curated Meltdown Festival back in 2012. Fraser, who at that point had not performed live for several years admitted she was "Shitting kittens at the prospect of making an audience [of close to 6,000 people] sit through 10 songs they had never heard before."

"Detail – very high on detail," is the way Reece describes the process behind the Sun's Signature project development. He cites Bernard Herrmann and John Barry's soundtrack work as part inspiration behind "the constant re-editing and re-recording of component parts" deployed to advance the material.

sunssignature.lnk.to/facebook

2 ABBA

ALBUM BOXSETS

Coinciding with the hotly-anticipated ABBA Voyage shows, the group are now getting the full back catalogue boxset treatment. Released in 180g 10LP and 10CD incarnations, the boxsets comprise ABBA's nine studio albums plus a specially curated disc of tracks which only appeared as singles. Also out on 10 June, will be a limited edition release of their studio album picture discs, available as 8LP or 9LP bundles, the latter including their latest long-player, *Voyage*.

shopmusic.abbavoyage.com

3 NEW ORDER

BRITISH RED CROSS UKRAINE CRISIS APPEAL

After recently marking the 40th anniversary of their debut album *Movement* by releasing their November 1981 Taras Shevchenko concert film on YouTube, the band are joining forces with the British Red Cross Ukraine Crisis Appeal to raise funds for those affected by the ongoing war in the country. A charity T-shirt is available from the band's webstore that replicates the VHS label of the Taras Shevchenko release (Fact 77), which was designed by Peter Saville Associates for its original sleeve artwork.

store.neworder.com/uk

4 TEENAGE FANCLUB

I LEFT A LIGHT ON

Not content with releasing one of 2021's finest albums in *Endless Arcade*, Teenage Fanclub are already planning a follow-up. An early preview is gorgeous ballad *I Left A Light On* – a song about finding hope in these dark times. Norman Blake explains: "I wrote this song on the piano at Rockfield Studios while we were mixing *Endless Arcade*. We went back there recently to record it. As a band, we've already started thinking about another new album and this song is the first signpost towards that."

teenagefanclub.com

5 THE STEP

LONDON SOUL – YOU WANT IT, YOU GOT IT!

Out on Acid Jazz imprint Countdown Records, this vinyl-only collection collects previously unreleased material from the early-80s Mod revivalists. Includes studio sessions, demos and live recordings from the classic soul-influenced seven-piece who gigged with The Kinks, Elvis Costello and Secret Affair.

acidjazz.co.uk

© Jimmy King

XPROPAGANDA
THE HEART IS STRANGE

ZTT

★★★★½

NEARLY 40 YEARS AFTER A SECRET WISH, PROPAGANDA'S FRONTWOMEN REUNITE WITH THEIR PRODUCER TO RECLAIM THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE AMONG SYNTH-POP'S FINEST

"All that we see or seem is but a dream within a dream." These words taken from an Edgar Allen Poe poem opened Propaganda's 1985 debut album, *A Secret Wish*, regularly considered by many among the finest German pop records ever made. And it certainly seemed a dream when Susanne Freytag and Claudia Brücken, alongside their debut's producer, Stephen Lipson, announced they would rekindle the band's spirit – albeit without Michael Mertens and Ralf Dörper – under the legally cautious name of xPropaganda.

It's not the first time that a follow-up's been attempted. Co-founder Mertens used the name for 1990's underwhelming *1234*, though Freytag only appeared on two tracks, Ralf Dörper co-wrote just four, and Brücken was absent altogether. A 1998 reunion without Dörper proved unsuccessful, too, despite Martin Gore and Tim Simenon's involvement, and leaked tapes confirmed they were right to quit. But now – finally – there's a successor similarly seeped in the monochrome beauty of Fritz Lang's films but glistening with the sleek lustre of contemporary technology.

They stake a claim to this territory from the outset, with *The Night*'s roar of synths evoking ZTT's mid-80s glory days and its stabs of synthetic strings, not to mention Terry Edwards' muted trumpets, surely intended to recall the tense feast that was their debut's opener. *Chasing Utopia*'s simmering keyboards prolong this pleasure, too, with Lipson's guitar another nod to earlier production styles and muttered German texts underlining the band's Teutonic roots.

Don't (You Mess With Me) returns us to more industrial sounds, its stern, snarled, one-note melody packing a disciplined punch, while *The Wolves Are Returning* asks "When history repeats must we take it in our stride?", its windswept drama lamenting the far right's rise in a manner more *Pleasuredome* than pleasure. *Only Human* and *No Ordinary Girl*, it's true, fall short of the high bar *A Secret Wish* set – though it's unfair to judge them against a record quite so old – but *Beauty Is Truth*'s shimmering synths, tyrannical beat and patient crescendo compensate. The closing *Ribbons Of Steel*, moreover, feels like the Omega to *Dream Within A Dream*'s Alpha, its spoken word tale of separation a high-tech riposte to Prefab Sprout's masterful *I Trawl The Megahertz*. It seemed too much to hope for, but this truly is a dream. **Wyndham Wallace**

REVIEWS

LIAM GALLAGHER
C'MON YOU KNOW / DOWN BY THE RIVER THAMES

WARNER

★★★★½ / ★★★★★

If Liam Gallagher's first two solo studio albums were well judged examples of giving fans what they want while pushing the envelope just that little bit further each time, then *C'Mon You Know* is the fullest – and finest – execution of that concept to date.

You'll still find his trademark splenetic bite alongside heart-on-the-sleeve balladry but sonic flourishes and surprises abound around almost every corner. Prepare yourselves for a haunted fairground waltz coda to *It Was Not Meant To Be*, a dub breakdown to the eviscerating, politically charged diatribe of *I'm Free* and mournful orchestration on *Moscow Rules*.

More Power, complete with a children's choir intro no less, is a neat metaphor for Liam's post Oasis split pragmatism: "The cut it never really heals, just enough to stop the bleed/ You won't get the girl you want but you'll get the girl you need."

A bouncing bassline and choppy guitars drive the funky *Diamond In The Dark*, while its "Now they know how many holes it takes to…" lyric ticks off the de rigueur Beatles nod this time.

Liam's emerging acceptance to show his softer side is given its most explicit expression via the epic title track ("I'm sick of acting like I'm tough"). Equally touching is the arm-around-the-shoulder solace of *Too Good For Giving Up*, a ballad straight out of the *Stop Crying Your Heart Out* mould destined to soundtrack the next time England are knocked out of a major tournament on penalties. *Don't Go Halfway* and *Everything's Electric* provide the most obvious straight-ahead rock'n'roll thrills while The Chemical Brothers-style wallop of *Better Days* recalls the duo's *Private Psychedelic Reel.*

Set for release on the same day as the studio album, what live record *Down By The River Thames* lacks in terms of crowd interaction – it was recorded onboard an audienceless barge for a lockdown livestream – it makes up for with a dynamic band performance. A crunching cover of *Columbia* and the Pistols punch of *Fade Away* resurrect Oasis' gnarliest moments while debut solo single *Wall Of Glass* remains box fresh. *Once* gives us a breather but it's a temporary respite – *Morning Glory*, a superb *Cigarettes And Alcohol* and breathless *Headshrinker* follow in quick succession on a mighty home straight.

A well-drilled live band and plenty of new songs to add to the setlist – Knebworth MkII is looking like a rather tasty prospect, eh? **Steve Harnell**

DUBSTAR
TWO

NORTHERN WRITES

★★★★

Two should really be called *Five*, of course. Mounting their comeback with, er, *One* in 2018, Dubstar continue the links with their 90s incarnation by the return of Stephen Hague – producer of the band's first two studio LPs, *Disgraceful* and *Goodbye*. Youth did a fine job helming *One*, but Hague was always the perfect channel for Sarah Blackwood's female Neil Tennant vocals, more perfectly enunciated Geordie inflections.

On *Two*, it's like Hague never left. There may be a reason he isn't still one of pop's biggest producers but, on this form, it only deepens the mystery as to why there aren't statues of him in most public parks.

It helps that Blackwood and Chris Wilkie's songwriting is still so glorious: the PSB comparisons can be furthered with the melancholy at the core of the opening side's superficially euphoric synth rush. *Token* sounds like it's about to burst into Erasure's *Stop!* at any moment, but is underpinned by Blackwood's heartbreaking lyrics of social anxiety. *Hygiene Strip* is the first great synth-pop song about COVID testing, a nod to *Two* being recorded remotely by its three key personnel. You'd never guess at the distancing: *Tectonic Plates* and *I Can See You Outside* are the equal of the classic *Not So Manic Now* for Dubstar dressing up despair in magnificent pop dramas.

The second side is more naked in its emotional heft. *Tears* is propelled by Wilkie's waltzing keyboards, yet *Kissing To Be Unkind* is even more devastating thanks to its sparse piano accompaniment. Only *Social Proof*, a humdrum guitar bop which reminds listeners that Dubstar arrived at the height of Britpop, fails to take flight.

Two ends with a cover of R.E.M.'s ballad *Perfect Circle* from their debut *Murmur.* What they do to it here is beautiful, but then so is most of *Two.* A band way ahead of their time, hopefully the world has finally caught up to give Dubstar the love they still deserve. **John Earls**

THE WATERBOYS
ALL SOULS HILL

COOKING VINYL

★★★½

With four albums since 2015, Mike Scott's work rate is enviably industrious. In fact, this 15th Waterboys album is strictly his 16th, its release deemed so pressing its predecessor remains in the vaults for now. That urgency, no doubt, relates to some of its subject matter, expressed in comparatively witty terms on the seemingly jovial *Here We Go Again*, which is about humanity's inability to learn from its mistakes, and in more poetic terms on the title track, a galloping but bleak tune about the world's recent descent into confusion. The latter's reference to "a monstrous lie told by a charlatan choir" may be opaque, but it likely shares its subject with the fierce *The Liar*, which doesn't mince its words, though they remain typically poetic – "the liar stood clad in his cloak of victimhood" – and aren't going to go down well with Donald Trump supporters.

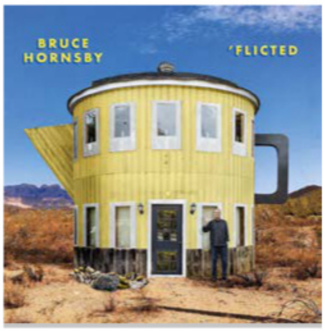
But Scott's also enviably determined to reinvent himself, and here he's aided by Simon Dine, who helped reimagine Paul Weller's style in the early 2000s. Consequently, the breakbeats underpinning recent albums are heftier, especially on the joyous *Blackberry Girl*, but stick around for the closing *Passing Through*, Scott's gospel-inflected, expanded update of Dick Blakeslee's post-war folk standard. **WW**

BRUCE HORNSBY
'FLICTED

ZAPPO PRODUCTIONS

★★★½

For an indication of his latest album's cerebral nature, check out *Tag*, where Bruce Hornsby announces "a humble brag is never that", then crowbars in the word "eschatological", all while slowly developing the song's rhythmically nagging piano melody into something jazzier and offering hints of Peter Gabriel in his vocal lines. And yet, while *'Flicted* isn't always easy listening, it's not exclusionary. *Maybe Now*'s frantic, low piano trills and nervous rimshots are way more thrilling than one might expect of a song about being digitally cut off during a storm – and his Prince-like falsetto's revelationary – while *The Hound*'s full of jagged piano motifs and random snare drums, Hornsby pointing to "the guy who... had the wet spot at the cotillion dance" while investigating social media pile-ons.



Elsewhere, *Sidelines*, with its echoing chords, invokes Bon Iver – in fact, Justin Vernon's involved here again – while *Bucket List*, with its clarinet and weird string sounds, would no doubt impress Van Dyke Parks. With Danielle Haim boosting *Days Ahead*'s sappy quotient and *Simple Prayer II*'s moving testament to families dealing with loss – not to mention a tremendous reinvention of Chuck Berry's *Too Much Monkey Business* – this is wildly entertaining, frequently witty and genuinely inventive art-pop. **WW**

UB40 FEATURING ALI CAMPBELL & ASTRO
UNPRECEDENTED

UMC

★★★

Two tracks in, one might wonder what the point is of the latest album from this branch of the troubled UB40 production line. A cover of The Frightnrs' *What Have I Done* is polished but unadventurous and Ali Campbell's *We'll Never Find Another Love* provides yet another melodically strong but gloopy tune. But then the dub-heavy title track strides in, offering an acerbic take on the pandemic, Astro mourning "Our doctors and our nurses, dying/ All the politicians, lying," and one recalls the group's history of political commentary. They're at it again, too, on *Emperors Wore No Clothes*, taking a swipe at politicians.

It's this combination of sentiments, like their mix of originals and covers, that makes *Unprecedented* valuable. Admittedly, Bill Withers' *Lean On Me* probably didn't need yet another interpretation – even with Bounty Killer appearing on an additional CD version – but Kris Kristofferson's *Sunday Mornin' Comin' Down* works unexpectedly well, as does, less surprisingly, Louisa "Markswoman" Mark's lovers rock baptism, *Caught You In A Lie*, with Ali's daughter Indica singing. That Astro died two weeks after mixing in November last year makes this release especially poignant. **WW**

EVERYTHING EVERYTHING
RAW DATA FEEL

INFINITY INDUSTRIES

★½

Jonathan Higgs has never been a stranger to curious lyrics treading a fine line between the absurd and the ingenious, but his decision to collaborate with Artificial Intelligence on Everything Everything's sixth album can only be described – diplomatically, at least – as a misstep. Some might argue he's employed a technological update of William Burroughs' cut-and-paste techniques, but here this feels like the last, desperate refuge of the uninspired. Try as one might, there's frankly no joy to be found in a falsetto wailing "Here where the lamprey lies/ It ate a lot of French fries", as he does rather gormlessly on the fidgety *Hex*, while *Metroland Is Burning*'s "The escalator breathing in a hydra howl" isn't half as clever as it thinks.

Still, lyrics aren't everything, but another problem is Higgs' high-pitched falsetto, which quickly wears thin, letting up only briefly on *Kevin's Car*, where, ironically, he reveals a glimpse of a baritone as fine as Neil Hannon's, and *Born Under A Meteor*, on which he suavely exhumes the ghost of a-ha's *Take On Me* melody. The latter, though, like *Leviathan*, provides a welcome break from an otherwise relentlessly frantic landscape of bland electronic pop for those suffering ADD. Indeed, a briefly isolated guitar on *Jennifer* feels like a luxury next to *I Want A Love Like This*'s bubbly synths and pixelated vocals. **WW**

EMF
GO GO SAPIENS

EMF RECORDS

★★★

"Whatever happened to our heroes?" James Atkin asks on *Go Go Sapiens*'s highlight, *Equilibrium*, over a busy, 1990s-era breakbeat. It's a good question. Last widely seen covering The Monkees with Vic Reeves and Bob Mortimer in 1995 – their only release to match the success of 1990's advertisement-popular anthem *Unbelievable* – EMF nonetheless crowdfunded this fourth album, so there are definitely folk eager to see their return stretch beyond the festival appearances of recent years.

Sadly, Zac Foley departed this earth two decades ago, but otherwise this matches 1991's *Schubert Dip*, if largely by being less exciting than one hopes. There are, naturally, throwbacks to their glory days: *Started It* sounds like *Give Out But Don't Give Up*-period Primal Scream fronted by a high-pitched Shaun Ryder, though *Never Die* might have been rejected from the same album, while *We Are The Free* resurrects a baggy beat (and the ghost of World Of Twist). *Keep It Coming*, though, adds hard rock riffage to sound like Red Hot Chilli Peppers requesting service in a Gloucestershire tea room, and, in contrast, *The Greatest Day* is a melancholic acoustic tune that would empty that tea room out.

It's far from unforgivable, but if only it were a little bit closer to unbelievable. **WW**

WET LEG
WET LEG

DOMINO

★★★★

Venerable indie Domino has always had an ear for artists with offbeat but immediate crossover potential, the kind who – whether Pavement, Franz Ferdinand or Arctic Monkeys – are as irresistible to students as the jaded middle-aged. Now they've landed the Isle Of Wight's Wet Leg, a band so popular they've had songs covered already. But though, for instance, Sprints' *Chaise Longue* is faithful, it can't match the intangible charms of Rhian Teasdale's and Hester Chambers' original, barnstorming debut, because here's the crux: this duo ooze an unusual, invincible charisma which combines ennui with energy to impressive effect.

That's why a tune this simple is so effective, and the same applies to *Angelica* and *Oh No*, both built around singular riffs and a devil-may-care attitude as riotously entertaining as Pixies' on 1989's *Doolittle*.

Opener *Being In Love* launches in feet first, too, declaring early on "I feel so uninspired I feel like giving up" – readers, they do *not* – while their lyrics are frequently comically absurd. The resolute mischievous, *Wet Dream* mocks a self-abusing male who's offered, "I've got *Buffalo 66* on DVD" as a chat-up line, and *Loving You* slows things down with an airy, deceptively girlish dismissal of another literal wanker. **WW**

JOHN ILLSLEY
VIII

100% RECORDS

★★★½

"This is the 21st century," John Illsley sings on *21st Century*, which might still come as a surprise since you'd be forgiven for mistaking his eighth album for one from the Dire Straits vault. Not only does *VIII*'s gently distorted guitar murmur like Mark Knopfler's, but his half-whispered, half-growled vocals are almost a dead ringer for the frontman's too. But Illsley, too, deserves to be forgiven, because though his name may be somewhat less familiar than Knopfler's, he was one of the four gentlemen who co-founded the much-maligned band, and in their absence, *VIII* will definitely suffice.

Indeed, opener *It's A Long Way Back*, with its subdued introduction, decorative guitar squeals and subtle bursts of background organ, sounds like a distant, livelier cousin of *Telegraph Road*, and in fact its lyrics also reflect Illsley's days in the group. Whether Dire Straits would have adopted the none-more-white reggae-blues of *The Mission Song* is open to question, it's true, but on *Market Town*, with its gently rolling piano lines, he sounds so moved it's like he's shivering in a Northern breeze, while the pedal steel floating over *Wondering* only adds to its already wistful qualities. *Which Way Is Up* is more guitar showcase than song, but that he concludes with the somnolent *I'm Only Sleeping* is appropriate, and no criticism either. **WW**

ANN WILSON
FIERCE BLISS

SILVER LINING MUSIC

★★½

Though Heart's Ann Wilson recorded her third solo album in Nashville, don't expect a country vibe. Its cover's by Roger Dean, too, but don't expect anything that sounds like Yes. Admittedly, the dramatic *Gladiator* sounds like mid-80s Marillion working up a heavy sweat, but there's no doubt that this is a classic rock album, even if 'classic' is arguably a generous epithet.

Either way, it harks back to the 80s with more than its artwork, not least because Wilson – "known," Wikipedia reminds us, "for her banshee screams" – now sounds worryingly a lot like a gruff, poodle-haired male rocker.

Indeed, one has to hope she's got a decent otolaryngologist, because Vince Gill, who joins her on a cover of Queen's *Love Of My Life*, the album's inevitable big ballad, sounds a lot more feminine than she does here. *Black Wing*, meanwhile, recalls the days when Jon Bon Jovi sang about being "a cowboy on a steel horse", though the song's more of a trot than a canter.

Another not entirely necessary cover, this time of Eurythmics' *Missionary Man*, is dominated by Kenny Wayne Shepherd's guitar heroics, but *Fighten For Life* is a heavy-hitting epic better at building to a climax than spelling, and the greatest shame is that *Angel's Blues*, which revives Janis Joplin's spirit, is only on the CD. Wilson knows her audience well, one suspects, but this won't earn her a new one. **WW**

INTERLOPERS
INTERLOPERS

CHRYSALIS

★★★½

It's unclear what's happened to The Big Dish's Steven Lindsay over the past 15 years. He's apparently enjoyed a painting career, but this new project is dominated by a sombre, unidentified regret. Take its opening triptych, delivered with glossy production at a mid-tempo pace, his soulful voice straining to communicate his anguish. The dogged *Move On* provides a melancholic introduction about leaving one's troubles behind, while one plaintive track later

he's complaining *Something Got Lost Along The Way*, and the next, underlined by piano and, occasionally, a disembodied operatic voice, is about how *Nothing Will Ever Be The Same Again*.

Even afterwards, on *The North Sea* – which sets out like the likeminded Blue Nile's *The Downtown Lights* – he's dissatisfied with the weather, while, amid ringing guitars, Lindsay's "lost alone at sea" on *Hypnotised*, though he's eventually thrown a line by a guitar solo. Still, if this vague mood's maintained to the end, there's welcome solace in here nonetheless, not least on elegant torch song *Down On The Boulevard* and the refined *Twins Of Gemini*, initiated by The Associates' Billy Mackenzie and Alan Rankine, then ultimately finished by Lindsay. It's good to have him back, if not exactly an excuse for a party. **WW**

DEF LEPPARD
DIAMOND STAR HALOS

UNIVERSAL

★★★½

Sometimes it's hard to define why one album that sounds like it could be decades old works and another one doesn't, but Def Leppard's 12th is going to defy most of the folk who consider them hoary old rockers. Sure, those obsessed with innovation may still mock them, but *Diamond Star Halos*, its title taken from Marc Bolan's *Get it On* – though glam's influence isn't *that* evident here beyond *Kick*'s chunky "Na Na Na" chorus – is chock-a-block full of undeniably

immediate, escapist, blockbuster anthems whose pleasures only a killjoy could deny.

It storms in with *Take What You Want*, a fist-pumping rawk anthem that's instantly recognisable as Def Leppard while vehemently demanding pyrotechnics, and *Give Me A Kiss* is another heavy riffing banger with a monumental chorus. *Fire It Up*, meanwhile, beefs up Queen's *We Will Rock You* and *From Here To Eternity* hints at their influence, too, though *This Guitar* proves they can still do sensitive power ballads, with Joe Elliott singing, "This guitar saved my life", but in the event that's not enough they toss in an entire orchestra as well. Moreover, if *U Rok Mi*'s dubious spelling can't hide the fact there's nothing especially original about it, least of all its production embellishments, it's still a bulldozer of a tune. **WW**

BLOSSOMS
RIBBON AROUND A BOMB

EMI

★★★½

Whether the time's right for droll allusions to weaponry is debatable, but Blossoms' fourth album's unfortunate title appears to be the only thing about it that's anything less than benevolent. If there's any criticism to be made here it's that one can't imagine them offending *anyone*, from young kids to the grannies who once filled Pebble Mill studios. Some, therefore, may deem this outing tame, but anyone looking for politely endearing cheer instead of youthful insurrection can't go wrong.

Smiths comparisons are inevitable, of course, particularly after the group memorably joined Rick Astley last year for shows celebrating the Johnny Marr/Morrissey legacy. Here, though, these point to the well-produced *Strangeways...* era and are justified by the admittedly jolly *Edith Machinist* – a Mozzer-esque title if ever there was one – and *Everything About You*, which adds charmingly puny keyboards to their jangles. Then there's *Ode To NYC*, where singer Tom Ogden utterly fails to contain his glee, and *Born Wild*, too, offers a jovial sensitivity, while *The Writer* finds him strumming an acoustic guitar alone, albeit not especially introspectively. *Cinerama Holy Days*, though, is basically a chipper take on *All Along The Watchtower*, and only *Care For*'s Bee Gees strut strays from their amiable indie template. Nice work if you can get it. **WW**

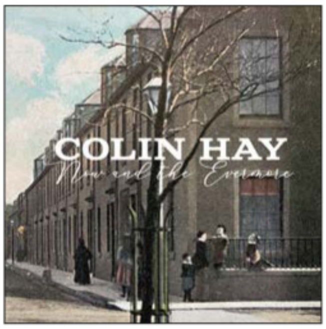
COLIN HAY
NOW AND THE EVERMORE

LAZY EYE / COMPASS RECORDS

★★★

Now his seventies are just a year or so away, Men At Work's Colin Hay has turned his attention to mortality, with humanity's impermanence a thread from the start of his 15th studio album to its end.

Opening with the title track, Hay finds himself kept awake by a Salvation Army band "till I couldn't take it any more" – though this apparent nuisance is presumably the inspiration for the brass at the song's climax, and possibly the timid drum fill with which his pal Ringo Starr



introduces it – and he's still posing existential questions 10 songs later on *When Does The End Begin?*

Not that this has left him pessimistic. *Into The Bright Lights* provides a big budget 'against all the odds' metaphor about survival, and *The Sea Of Always* is about both perseverance in life and acceptance of death. *Undertow*'s central trope, it's true, is well-worn, but the song's chamber pop is nonetheless uplifting, and on *Starfish And Unicorns* strings help him pay fond, touching tribute to "an imperfect love/ Our horns ever locking" who's now gone for good. Even *Agatha Bell*, about a mysterious woman who leaves a trail of dead men behind her, is cheerful. Thoughtful and well-crafted, Hay's lyrics, like his music, offer few revelations, but they do add to the positivity expressed amid *Love Is Everywhere*'s Hammond organ-laced celebrations. **WW**

RÖYKSOPP
PROFOUND MYSTERIES

DOG TRIUMPH

★★★★

Though it's unlikely Norway's Svein Berge and Torbjørn Brundtland have spent all their time working since 2014's Robyn collaboration, the *Do It Again* EP, and their last full length, *The Inevitable End* – a record they said would be their last – it feels like they might have.

Profound Mysteries is the first part of a multi-disciplinary project incorporating film, fashion and art with, among other things, videos and visualisers for each track, and it suggests they challenged themselves to ensure their music was similarly cinematic.

It also calls upon multiple vocalists, all of them, this time at least, female, and certainly *If You Want Me*'s solemn nocturnal mood provokes Susanne Sundfør's most discreet performance for some time, while on *The Mourning Sun* she's frankly celestial. *Breathe*, too, provides Astrid S with a chance to exercise her pop chops, though it occupies a club-friendly space exploited even more effectively by *This Time, This Place*, whose luxurious textures would make Trevor Horn envious (and maybe even dance). *How The Flowers Grow* finds 4AD's Pixx offering a minimalist but ethereal melody over a moody synthscape, but Alison Goldfrapp's trademark sultry vocals steal the show amid the richly layered *Impossible*'s arpeggiated synths. Roll on Part 2! **WW**

KULA SHAKER
1ST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF ETERNAL LOVE AND FREE HUGS

STRANGEFOLK

★★★

A concept double album featuring five hammy interludes explaining its story set in a village church, with *that* album title and the fact many of its songs were written on ukulele while Crispian Mills was teaching music to his young sons, everything about Kula Shaker's fourth album since reuniting in 2004 screams "Run away!" Sure enough, a few songs are either sub-Kinks whimsy or knock-off George Harrison hippy hogwash but around two-thirds of the 15 full tracks see Kula Shaker regain the conviction in the power of rock'n'roll that made them so huge during Britpop.

Most of the original line-up have stayed the course. The only missing member is keyboardist Jay Darlington, seemingly in semi-retirement since joining Oasis' live band. The surviving trio and Darlington's replacement Harry Broadbent are superbly tight, with *I'm Against It* and *Don't Forsake Me* offering the simple thrills that propelled *Hey Dude* all those years ago. *108 Ways To Leave Your Narcissist* is the perfect marriage of their splenetic playing and Mills' humour. Nonsense and hubris were always a sizeable chunk to the band but, if you were able to dispense with the excess, there's an excellent single album here. **JE**

BELLE AND SEBASTIAN
A BIT OF PREVIOUS

MATADOR

★★★★

"Everything's divine when you're young and stupid," Stuart Murdoch reminds us on Belle And Sebastian's 11th album, but this can apparently still be true in your fifties. *Do It For Your Country* returns us, some way at least, to the sensitive tunefulness that first won them dedicated fans, and *Come On Home*'s slinky shuffle, too, sounds like an older, wiser version of the band that originally seduced with 1996's *Tigermilk*. This time around, their happy-go-lucky sophistication apparently derives from the luxury of time offered by recording in their home city for the first time since 1999, and there's no denying the upbeat charms of the staccato *Reclaim The Night*, while *If They're Shooting At You*'s grim outlook is lifted by a gospel-influenced sound similar to that exploited by Lambchop in the early 2000s.

In addition, Murdoch's and Sarah Martin's unison vocals on *Talk To Me Talk To Me* sparkle on one of their poppiest songs ever, while the muscular *Unnecessary Drama*'s harmonica squalls are, whatever they might say, necessarily dramatic. *Prophets On Hold*, though, is as gentle a disco tune as you'll hear, and the waltzing *Deathbed Of My Dreams* hints at Lee Hazlewood's sweetest Nancy Sinatra confectionary.

Even those who once considered this Scottish collective 'twee' must concede that B&S have earned a status that's little short of national treasures. **WW**

WALLIS BIRD
HANDS

MOUNT SILVER

★★★★

Still criminally neglected in the UK, though she's a radio star in her native Ireland and adopted Germany, Wallis Bird switches her focus on her seventh album – a move signalled by its title and cover, which put the finger she lost as a baby centre stage – to more introspective themes than 2018's soulful *Home* and 2019's politically charged *Woman*. Not that she does so quietly: the dynamic *What's Wrong With Changing* is as *Control*-ed as Janet Jackson's late 80s work and *I Lose Myself Completely*'s vigorous synths will appeal to the same era's pop fetishists. The wonderfully titled *No Pants Dance*, too, recalls the true story of an entertaining post-lockdown party witnessed by Bird from her apartment in a fashion which Prince himself would have approved.

But though closer *Pretty Lies* builds gently towards an impressive prog-influenced climax, other songs allow even more time to deliberate than dance. On the hushed *The Power Of A Word*, she explores language's strengths and weaknesses, while *Dreamwriting* lives up to its title in multiple fashions, and *I'll Never Hide My Love Away* offers a properly touching gesture of defiance. Equally eloquent is *The Dive*, a sentimental recollection of her partner's romantic convictions, but *Aquarius* steals the show with its humanitarian outlook – "be kind, be kind" – and a bridge that will leave listeners rapt. **WW**

HELD BY TREES
SOLACE

TWEED JACKET MUSIC

★★★★½

Inspired by *Spirit Of Eden* and *Laughing Stock*-era Talk Talk, David Joseph's ambitious instrumental project Held By Trees has rounded up an impressive roll call of musicians who played on the band's later work and Mark Hollis' solo LP, including Martin Ditcham, Robbie McIntosh, Laurence Pendrous and Simon Edwards to create an album that dips into that same wellspring of spacious exploration. Further intriguing names on board include blues guitarist Eric Bibb, Dire Straits founder David Knopfler and Blur/Damon Albarn collaborator Mike Smith.

Opener *Next To Silence* merges found sounds of the natural world with classical textures, before ushering in Ditcham's gently insistent backbeat for *In The Trees*, the closest track here in terms of feel to those last two Talk Talk albums and Hollis' solo work. Elsewhere, there's a delicate tension to the jazzy *Rain After Sun, Mysterium*'s two-note motif showcases a less-is-more ideology and the harmonium-led *An Approach* often dissolves into Eno levels of ambience. Held By Trees expand their musical palette to take in David Gilmour-like guitar phrases for the late Floyd vibe of *The Tree Of Life* before closer *The New Earth* builds to a thrilling, exultant climax. A gorgeous record, highly recommended for fans of Hollis' sparse aesthetic. **SH**

BLOC PARTY
ALPHA GAMES

INFECTIOUS

★★★

Two things one notices about Bloc Party's sixth album are Kele Okereke's fury and new drummer Louise Bartle's corresponding ferocity. Okereke spits lyrics over *Day Drinker*, which builds to a hardcore ending, and this carries over to *Traps*, which is founded on a vicious rock riff, with Okereke then switching to *sprechgesang*. He maintains this on *Callum Is A Snake*, which is particularly frantic, and though the spiky guitars of *By Any Means Necessary* aren't entirely new, *The Girls Are Fighting* puts glam makeup on post-punk. **WW**

THE CHAMELEONS
EDGE SESSIONS (LIVE FROM THE EDGE)

METROPOLIS RECORDS

★★★½

Manchester's under-sung post-punk heroes have reformed in various incarnations since 2000, with three tracks on this collection rescued from live recordings by Mark Burgess' and John Lever's ChameleonsVox manifestation. The rest come from 2021 sessions, with *Up The Down Escalator* lacking little of 1983's vitality, while *Singing Rule Britannia (While The Walls Close In)* may even sparkle with more brilliance than on 1985's *What Does Anything Mean? Basically*. **WW**

ROGER ENO
THE TURNING YEAR

DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON

★★★★

Though *Mixing Colours*, Roger Eno's lockdown-era release with brother Brian, shone an overdue spotlight on him, he's been releasing placid music since their 1983 ambient classic with Daniel Lanois, *Apollo: Atmospheres And Soundtracks*. With more recent events demanding reflection, his most ambitious album yet is also perfectly timed. *A Place We Once Walked* and *Clearly* pair hypnotic piano melodies with strings, and *Stars And Wheels'* organs are strangely elegiac. If *Hope* is so sparse it's barely there, moreover, it's lifted by a blessed sense of optimism. **WW**

FADER
QUARTZ

BLANC CHECK

★★★½

Fader's musical mastermind Benge says his third album with Blancmange's Neil Arthur is infused with 80s and 90s incidental TV music, but it's sometimes so bleak one can't help wondering whether *Threads* featured in his viewing. The paranoid *Olympia*'s one of its more cheerful tracks, and the quietly industrial *Manila* provides a rare chink of light, while *Prussian*'s starry nights manage a grim beauty. Elsewhere, *Porcelain*'s painfully unsettling, *Poison*'s bereft, and *Mondo*'s chilly desolation is almost overwhelming. **WW**

C DUNCAN
ALLUVIUM

BELLA UNION

★★★½

There's a gentle romance at the heart of C Duncan's fourth album that unexpectedly mirrors Richard Hawley's. You won't hear this in *Heaven*'s and *I Tried*'s airy synth-pop, nor the (relatively) upbeat, shimmering *Pretending*. Such elegance is there, nonetheless, in the lovely, waltzing *We Have A Lifetime*, on which his sensitive, high voice floats above a cotton wool backing, while his harmonies on the hymnal *Torso* are similarly celestial. *Sad Dreams*, too, is far prettier than its title suggests, while the title track's perfect for a romantic spy thriller. **WW**

MICHAEL HEAD & THE RED ELASTIC BAND
DEAR SCOTT

MODERN SKY

★★★★

A guitar pop genius since The Pale Fountains via The Strands and Shack, teaming up with fellow maverick Bill Ryder-Jones as producer pays off. There's plenty of Head's poignant melodies, but also the ambient symphony of *The Grass*, the Flaming Lips mood of *American Kid* and a piano lament in *Shirl's Ghost*. Named after an anecdote about F Scott Fitzgerald's struggles to write, Head's own battles are well-documented. But, as ever, he makes timeless pop sound so simple. Magical, moving and quietly defiant. **JE**

© Getty

THE ASSOCIATES / BILLY MACKENZIE
SULK / SATELLITE LIFE: RECORDINGS (1995-96)

BMG / CHERRY RED

★★★★★ / ★★★★

REVISITING THE GOLDEN MOMENT WHEN BILLY MACKENZIE SOMEHOW BECAME COMMERCIAL, AND THE TROUBLED MUSIC OF HIS FINAL YEARS

The correct example for the most unlikely band ever to go mainstream, and showing why the early 80s was a time when literally anybody could be a star, is The Associates. Some people cite Japan, which overlooks what an unfathomably beautiful band they were. Others claim Talk Talk, as if they didn't faff about making regular sub-Duran pop like everyone else before discovering free-jazz and not talking to anyone.

Post-punk in the sense they arrived after punk and shared its ethos that anyone could start a band, there had been glimmers of majesty on 1980's debut album *The Affectionate Punch* and its associated singles, but it still seems an incredible gamble of Warner's to sign The Associates; less so on the basis that the band's new demos consisted of *Party Fears Two* and *Club Country*. Those are two of the greatest singles ever made, but do they sound like *hits*? No, unless they were released in 1982. Thankfully, that's exactly when they arrived, so *of course* operatic melodramas about social anxiety and mental illness scurried up the charts. The large budget for *Sulk* and larger studio hijinks this resulted in are the stuff of 80s music industry legend but, although the band collapsed almost immediately after Mike Hedges finished recording, during those months in Camden there was also focus among the drugs and pissing in guitars.

Bookended by the flighty, mischievous instrumentals *Arrogance Gave Him Up* and *Nothinginsomethingparticular*, it's typical that the poppiest melodies aside from its singles don't feature Billy Mackenzie's uniquely multi-ranged and adjective-devouring voice, though the latter soon transformed into standalone hit *18 Carat Love Affair*, included on this 40th anniversary

© Mark Guthrie

reissue. More than virtually any other album, *Sulk* is its own world, Mackenzie's cryptic lyrics and invariably perfectly judged voice the ideal unreliable narrator for noirish mysteries like *Nude Spoons* and *Skipping*, where Michael Dempsey and John Murphy's undervalued rhythm section anchors the listener, only for Alan Rankine's flourishes to pull the rug from under the unwary. Decades on, there are still layers to the skittish *Bap De La Bap* to be uncovered.

As with 1981's *Fourth Drawer Down* compilation of the bewildering array of releases following *The Affectionate Punch*, even a major label couldn't sensibly collate The Associates' creativity. Thankfully, BMG have now mostly corralled the standalone songs like *Love Hangover* and John Leckie-produced *Australia* which offered more straight-ahead pop than their parent album.

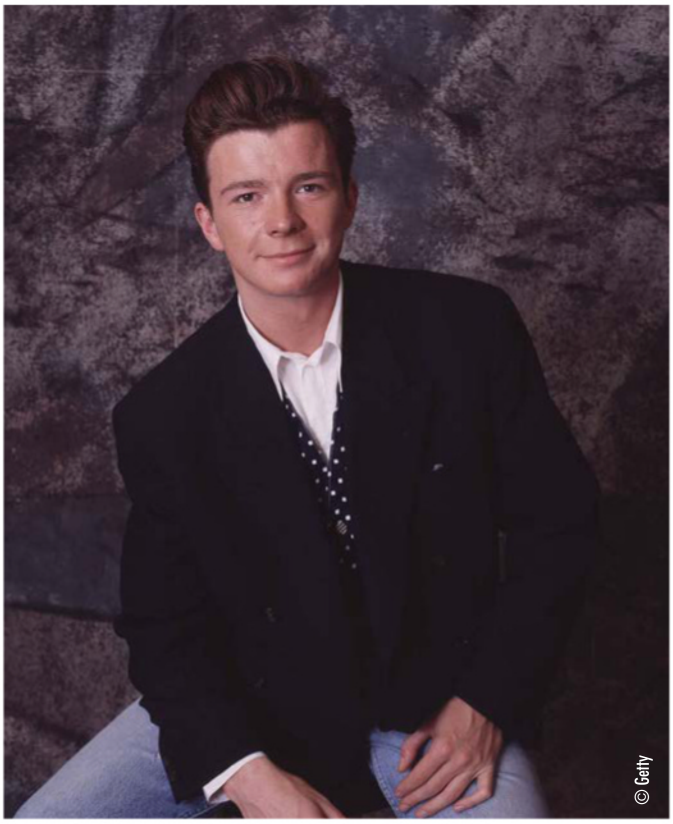
Among the half-dozen other tracks, *Ulcragyceptimol* stands out as a seeming vocal blueprint for Mackenzie's occasional pal Morrissey. Both Peel Sessions and a handful of demos are here, too, though annoyingly six previously released mixes are now missing, notably the wondrous 12" of *Club Country*, a mistake in not finally making *Sulk* definitive. Still, the new edition at last gives an official release to the closest *Sulk* came to a concert: a widely bootlegged 10-song Dutch radio session, sounding surprisingly regular with its more instantly recognisable rockist energy.

Rankine left four months after *Sulk* was released, so one of the all-time great art-pop albums was never toured. None of the band ever matched its heights again: there's no shame in not living up to perfection, and hopefully *Sulk* will usher in reissues of other Associates albums: 1988's *The Glamour Chase* and 1990's *Wild And Lonely* especially need some love as well as a competent cataloguer.

Meanwhile, Cherry Red have commendably at least tried to make sense of Mackenzie's final work. The dozens of recordings he made in his final two years have previously been issued posthumously as the albums *Beyond The Sun*, *Eurocentric*, *Auchtermatic* and *Transmission Impossible*.

Copyright reasons mean a handful of collaborations with Loom and Yello's Boris Blank are missing, but *Satellite Life* is a decent 39-song round-up of a singer increasingly drawn to torch songs. By his standards, the acoustic *Blue It Is* and piano lament *And This She Knows* are traditional ballads. There are still experiments recalling his early sonic adventurousness: *Hornophobic* and *14th Century Nightlife* are Mackenzie having a high old time going jungle; *Sour Jewel* sees him succumb to Britpop.

Mackenzie was beautiful singing cabaret, but he was beautiful singing anything. It's 25 years since his death and there's never been anyone like him. How incredibly lucky we were to have Billy Mackenzie at all. **John Earls**



© Getty

RICK ASTLEY
WHENEVER YOU NEED SOMEBODY

BMG

★★★★

Celebrating 35 years since the teaboy from Newton-le-Willows went global, at this remove it's bizarre that Rick Astley was ever doubted. Sure, the perennial patronising of working class northerners in pop helped make Astley's background seem unlikely for a superstar but, as soon as he sang, it was obvious there was a major talent ready to burst forth. In Astley, SAW had a gift for bringing their pop to life. Sure enough, *Never Gonna Give You Up* packed about 306 hooks around Astley's boom, with the title track and *Together Forever* just as factory ready for eternal chart dominance.

However, the production trio didn't get to be so successful without knowing when to ease up on the froth when necessary. Aware that Astley's voice was composed enough not to need trickery, it's great to hear a more soulful, relaxed backing let Rick tell the story in *The Love Has Gone* and the easy bounce of *No More Looking For Love*. Only the clunky office drama *You Move Me* really shows its age, sounding like it was written by someone who's never been a wage slave in their life.

Far more than just its singles, *Whenever You Need Somebody* is one of the great SAW albums. Following its vinyl reissue, the 2CD edition adds a host of B-sides and remixes. It's maddening that the digital edition adds an extra four tracks, especially when even that doesn't account for all the PWL remixes from its original singles. A 3CD set was needed, but at least the many mixes that make it, like Phil Harding's mighty 12" of *Never Gonna Give You Up* and Pete Hammond's *House Of Love* mix of *Together Forever*, show PWL's affinity with early rave. Astley has long enjoyed the last laugh. Here's why he should have been smiling all along. **JE**

SPARKS
21ST CENTURY SPARKS COLLECTION

BMG

★★★★

A WELCOME INVITATION TO REASSESS THE OFT-NEGLECTED BUT INGENIOUS BACK CATALOGUE AMASSED BY THE DYNAMIC DUO DURING THIS CENTURY'S FIRST DECADE

Given Edgar Wright's documentary *The Sparks Brothers* and their acclaimed rock opera movie *Annette*, Sparks' profile hasn't been higher since the late 70s. They never disappeared, though: *When Do I Get to Sing 'My Way'* was a hit in 1994, and there have also been so far unfulfilled projects with Tim Burton and Francis Ford Coppola. It's time, then, to celebrate the eccentric duo with a series of vinyl represses and expanded CDs of their first five 21st century albums.

Russell and Ron Mael kicked off with 2000's *Balls*, its title track epitomising their irreverence, while the anthemic *More Than A Sex Machine* makes Pet Shop Boys seem glum. Bonus tracks include the breakbeat-backed *Calm Before The Opera* and two versions of *The Angels*, including a dreamy production by Tony Visconti. The playful introduction to their concerts, *It's A Sparks Show*, is also included for the first time.

Sparks returned two years later with *Lil' Beethoven*, a quasi-classical *tour de force* whose opener *The Rhythm Thief* advises "Say goodbye to the beat." There's no denying *How Do I Get To Carnegie Hall?*'s rousing rhythms, however, while *What Are All These Bands So Angry About?* is uproariously funny. Five bonuses include Ron narrating *The Legend Of Lil' Beethoven* and a brassy 'Ron Speaks' version of *Suburban Homeboy*.

2006 brought *Hello Young Lovers*, which expanded on its predecessor's orchestral arrangements on *Waterproof*. Its operatic opener, *Dick Around*, is another example of Sparks' uniquely slapstick high culture, and *(Baby, Baby) Can I Invade Your Country* is a satire about American imperial inclinations made more painful by imperial inclinations elsewhere more recently. The latter reappears with different lyrics as one of two bonus tracks, alongside a cover of *We Are The Clash*, which sounds like a football crowd performing to a string section.

The wonderfully titled *Lighten Up, Morrissey* and similarly mordant, glam-influenced *I Can't Believe That You Would Fall For All The Crap In This Song* alone make 2008's *Exotic Creatures Of The Deep* worthwhile, though the oddly poignant *I've Never Been High* helps. Five bonuses include the compellingly monotonous *Brenda Is Always In The Way* and two tongue-in-cheek themes for KCRW's *Bookworm* show, but the Maels are at their most literate on 2009's *The Seduction Of Ingmar Bergman*, which may be the best place to start if *Annette* re-piqued your interest. Once a radio musical and soon an animated film, its 24 tracks require no extras, with *Limo Driver (Welcome To Hollywood)* indicative of its engrossing, riotous creativity.

Wyndham Wallace

GO WEST
GO WEST

CHRYSALIS

★★★★

It's taken more than 35 years, but it's great to see Go West finally being taken seriously. The duo's cheery nostalgia circuit ubiquity has allowed old jokes about mullets and 80s production values to get in the way of Peter Cox and Richard Drummie's skills with a grandstanding chorus.

The recent orchestral tour with the Southbank Sinfonia and this handsomely packaged five-disc reissue of their 1985 debut album shows there was always a lot more going on. That insistent opening riff of *We Close Our Eyes* is still a fantastic clarion call to the dancefloor, matched by the muscular *SOS*. It's true that producer Gary Stevenson – who oversees the boxset's remastering – was sometimes too ready to bury the melodies with trickery. Cox's tender vocals on the yearning *Eye To Eye* deserved something subtler than the parping irritations he's submerged in. However, Stevenson was capable of finesse, as the sumptuous *Goodbye Girl* demonstrates.

The original album is certainly a time capsule, fuller of enthusiasm and heroic ambition than "What does that button do?" missteps. The duo's power as a live act is brought home on the fourth disc's full concert from Hammersmith Odeon, pulling off a taut cover of *Ball Of Confusion* among leaner takes of the big songs. There's chance to see the sweat, via a Japanese gig on the comprehensive DVD that also features six TV appearances, including a hilariously deadpan *Whistle Test* performance.

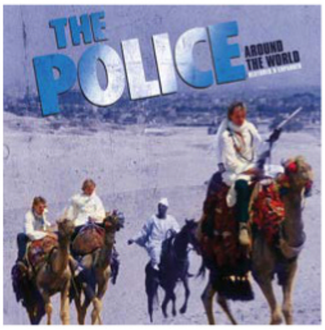
Oddly, there are six demos but the infamous "colliding ice-cream vans" demo of *Call Me* that landed Go West's record deal is missing, as is *We Close Our Eyes* from the same tape. Not quite as definitive as it could have been, then, *Go West* is still a welcome reminder of just how well-preserved these songs have become while very few people were paying attention. **JE**

THE POLICE
AROUND THE WORLD / GREATEST HITS

MERCURY STUDIOS / UMC POLYDOR

★★★½ / ★★★★★

In 1980, with second album *Reggatta de Blanc* successful almost everywhere, The Police embarked on a global trek taking in rarely toured countries. That these included Argentina and Chile, then under dictatorships, underlined their ambitions, and significant legal issues – drugs discovered in luggage by New Zealand police, gear held by Indian customs – didn't help.



Unfortunately, though these are entertainingly related in Andy Summers' liner notes, they're sadly all but swept under the carpet in 1982's 65-minute documentary *Around The World*, finally released on DVD and Blu-ray. Executive produced by manager Miles Copeland – drummer Stewart's brother – it's instead a high-budget home video, its introduction in Kyoto's Zen Gardens intended to emphasise a spiritual side otherwise absent. It's fun watching the puny Summers battered by a sumo wrestler, of course, not to mention checking out a French audience in blond wigs. It's also enlightening to spot Copeland's drums emblazoned with a very special message aimed directly at Sting.

Nonetheless, occasional acts of cultural insensitivity – Summers stereotyping Japanese accents, Copeland mocking Japanese food – as well as Sting and Copeland performing in their own band's T-shirts might make one cringe.

Still, their live shows are a sometimes-tremendous reminder of why The Police were so popular, if not always of how tight they could be. Bonuses include four live songs, with *Next To You* in Kyoto full of punkish energy, though *Message In A Bottle* finds Sting straining for the notes in Hong Kong. A live CD, drawing on Kyoto, Hong Kong and Hammersmith provides further insight, though tragically *Message In A Bottle* fares little better in London.

Also back out on vinyl for its 30th anniversary, *Greatest Hits* – remastered, and cut at half-speed – is a more reliable source of pleasure. Shorn of their documentary smugness, with later material included, it confirms the trio's ongoing status as classic pop legends. **WW**

© Getty

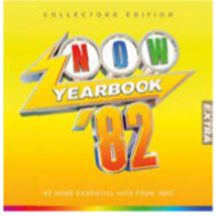
VARIOUS ARTISTS
NOW YEARBOOK '81 / NOW YEARBOOK '82 EXTRA / NOW EIGHTIES DANCEFLOOR

NOW

★★★★★ / ★★★★½ / ★★★★★

Firmly established as the best "Best Of the best compilations" series, NOW's *Yearbook* run gains a frisson of anticipation when seeing how well they choose songs from the years when there are no existing previous *Now That's What I Call Music* sets to pick from. Having got it spot on in the past, 1981 is possibly the best *Yearbook* so far. The opening 15-song run on CD1 from *Under Pressure* to *Physical* is staggering. The indie of Elvis Costello and Siouxsie And The Banshees next to soul from Imagination and Champaign proves just how much was going on that year: this is a compilation that shows 1981's charts were varied enough for *Ghost Town*, *Bette Davis Eyes* and *Begin The Beguine*.

The *Yearbook Extra* series is a fabulously sneaky addition: with the regular *Yearbooks* serving up the biggest hits, the compilers can choose their own favourites



for the hardcore devotees. As with others in the run, 1982 is a peach: The Belle Stars, John Mellencamp and Trio were brilliant de facto one-hit wonders, while Haircut One Hundred, Culture Club and even Paul McCartney (via the earworm *Take It Away*) compile generally neglected gems from their back catalogue.

Great as those compilations are, the 4CD *Eighties Dancefloor* is possibly even better. Perfectly executed, it's roughly divided into soul, funk, Hi-NRG and rave across the four discs. You'll have your own favourite, but it's impossible not to go wild for at least one of these sets. If you don't cut unseemly shapes to Gwen Guthrie, Shannon, Man 2 Man or S'Express, you can't dance at all. For our money: the passion erupting from the rave bangers highlights the need for a full *Now Rave* compilation asap, please. A stupendous compilation. **JE**

KRAFTWERK
REMIXES

PARLOPHONE

★★★★

How do you improve on perfection? The idea of touching Kraftwerk's music is sacrilegious to many, but thankfully the men machine have allowed a handful of remixers to get to work.

After suddenly appearing on streaming platforms in 2020, *Remixes* gets 2CD and 3LP physical editions to showcase what producers made of *Radioactivity*, *Expo 2000*, *Aéro Dynamik* and *La Forme*.

For many, the highlight will be Kraftwerk extending their rare

30-second MTV jingle *Non Stop* into eight minutes of Aphex Twin-style menace especially for the compilation.

Non Stop burbles along mischievously, but it's much less club-friendly than William Orbit's 1991 *Hardcore* mix of *Radioactivity*. It's the benchmark on how to remix Kraftwerk: approach with confidence and bring your own style, as also followed by Orbital on the sleek *Expo 2000* and Hot Chip, who thankfully sound every bit at home polishing up *Aéro Dynamik* and *La Forme* as you'd hope.

Only the handful of producers who are overly respectful come away bruised, though Alex Gopher and Étienne de Crécy's *Dynamik* mix of *Aéro Dynamik* is route one EDM. Kraftwerk's own mixes are faultless – the wild 2002 mix of *Expo 2000* showing what could have been if they weren't so concerned with preserving their heritage. **JE**

DARYL HALL & JOHN OATES / DARYL HALL
MARIGOLD SKY / BEFOREAFTER

LEGACY

★★ / ★★★★

One of just three regular albums the duo have made since 1990, 1997's *Marigold Sky* shows the clamour for a new Daryl Hall & John Oates album might be misjudged. Available on vinyl and streaming for the first time, it's no lost classic and its (minor) hit *Promise Ain't Enough* is unusually syrupy rather than smooth. Judging from these forced attempts at reigniting their spark, it appears our heroes knew when to rely on touring the classics instead.

Which is where Daryl's new solo compilation *BeforeAfter* comes in. While John has eased into country music for his own career, Daryl's five Oates-less albums highlight how it's not just his most familiar helper who he works well with. Hall's *Sacred Songs* from 1980 is an overlooked marvel, a cast including Phil Collins and Brian Eno helping create a tense, electrifying mood. The songs from 1993's *Soul Alone* admirably do as the title described, and a handful of duets from his TV show *Live At Daryl's House* continue the collegiate mood. Add in the more expected smooth style from Hall's most recent album *Laughing Down Crying* from 2011 and, for creativity, it's clear both men get along just fine without each other. **JE**

MADNESS
WONDERFUL

BMG

★★★★

Madness' vinyl reissue campaign extends into the second full chapter of the band's career. With 1984's great *Keep Moving* belatedly released in March (we reviewed it in issue 70 when it was first due for release), it means 1985's *Mad Not Mad* is the only Madness 1.0 album not reborn on vinyl – expect news of that imminently.

Here, then, is 1999's comeback record, released seven years after the gents had reformed for the classic Madstock concert, at a time when the band were beginning to tire of only performing the classics. Of course, 23 years on and glorious comeback single *Lovestruck* is as familiar as any of the 80s hits. *Keep Moving* had been the last time all seven Nutty Boys had featured on an album but, aided by the reassuring presence and ability to hone in on a melody of producers Clive Langer and Alan Winstanley, *Wonderful* had big tunes to spare, not least *Johnny The Horse*, Chas Smash's perfect blend of the surrealist chaos of early Madness with the melancholy of their later 80s singles. Ian Dury knew he was dying when he featured on *Drip Fed Fred*, which became his final burst of mischief. Mike Barson made his joy at being back in the fold clear on *Going To The Top*. And so it continued. A first-time vinyl release for an aptly-named return. **JE**

TOYAH
TOYAH! TOYAH! TOYAH!

CHERRY RED

★★★★

One of the most tantalising of promised releases in the ongoing Toyah reissue campaign, Cherry Red have thankfully done what fans hoped in overhauling the band's 1980 live album. A word-of-mouth phenomenon that eventually went silver, the concert from famed Wolverhampton 600-capacity club Lafayette has added its missing three songs including the electrifying *She*.

While Toyah Willcox was soon able to brilliantly distil her energy into a poppier world, her band's original chaos is captured fantastically in an anarchic performance, brought further to life on the five tracks filmed on the accompanying bonus DVD, notably a feral *Insects*.

The DVD also includes the long overdue official release of ITV documentary *Toyah* from the same year, which shadowed the singer. For someone who was yet to have a chart hit, it was a commendably prescient programme, though the young Toyah was so magnetic that she was gold dust for anyone curious enough to tune in.

The doc works as cultural history, too, with footage of Toyah's Battersea home showing it was possible for struggling musicians to turn a London warehouse into a thriving artistic community on the cheap 40 years ago. What could have been dingy chaos crackles with magnetism, both on audio and visual. **JE**

MARC ALMOND
STRANGER THINGS

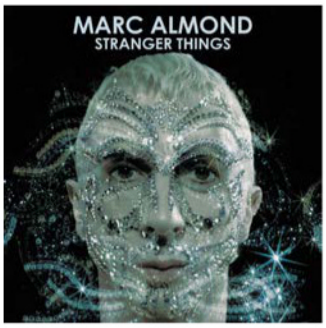
SFE

★★★★

Overshadowed on its release in 2001 by news of Soft Cell's first reunion soon after, Marc Almond's album with Icelandic modern classical composer Jóhann Jóhannsson is an intoxicating combination.

Like a more adventurous and exploratory take on Almond's Trevor Horn hook-up on *Tenement Symphony* a decade earlier, the pair tease out Marc's orchestral passions, but here take them somewhere more exotic. *Lights* and *Tantalise Me* are traditional enough melodramas, but by then Almond has already offered the shimmering beauty of *Glorious* and the future-pop symphony *Come Out*, matched later by the atypically funky *When It's Your Time*.

Marc's glam foundations are taken down a back street and roughed up on the wild *Dancer*, while *End In Tears* is a romance only Almond is capable of. As well as a first-time vinyl release, the 3CD edition adds eight demos, nine live songs and a welter of the underground club collaborations that the singer specialised in during the era. Electroclash makeover *I'm The Boy* with Trash Palace is the pick, though Jóhannsson's pulsating mix of Replicant duet *Fur* also dazzles and Berlin duo Rosenstolz bring a Marc And The Mambas sleaze to *Amo Vitam*. A reminder of the sadly curtailed inventive production career of the late Jóhannsson. **JE**



GIRLS AT OUR BEST!
PLEASURE

CHERRY RED

★★★½

One of the lost cult Leeds bands, Girls At Our Best!'s sole 1981 album *Pleasure* manages to keep its enthusiasm and breakneck pace throughout.

Dozens of ideas whirl by: a Bunnymen mix of ambition and gloom in *Go For Gold*, a Madness fairground feel to *Too Big For Your Boots*, the straight-up punk of *£600,000*. It's anchored by Judy Evans' defiant yell – sometimes too affected for the melodies underneath, but always distinctive and often exciting as hell.

Originally reissued in 2009, the new 3CD version keeps 2009's Radio One sessions and standalone tracks, adding two gigs, including a thrillingly chaotic show from New York on the US tour which split the band.

Also featured are their final instrumental demo, the frankly unremarkable *Boys At Their Best!*, and a rallying pre-GAOB! demo from Evans and fluid guitarist James Alan's previous punk band The Butterflies.

Evans soon quit music to become an ad executive, but this is a thorough document of how she could have become as influential as Toyah if she'd carried on. There are a wealth of great singalong indie-pop choruses among the 17 tunes – no wonder The Wedding Present covered the infectious *Getting Nowhere Fast*. Quietly influential, and more importantly still fun over 40 years on. **JE**

FOREIGNER
AGENT PROVOCATEUR

MUSIC ON VINYL

★★★

As ubiquitous in American charity shops as Elton John and Rod Stewart LPs are over here, Foreigner's fifth album was given a pop polish by co-producer Alex Sadkin, backing vocals by Thompson Twins and synths from Wally Badarou. That doesn't help some songs falling into overblown AOR hell, but *I Want To Know What Love Is* and *Down On Love* are stone-cold classics. Their only No.1 album here is back out on vinyl, but it'd still be intriguing to hear what would have happened with original planned producer Trevor Horn. **JE**

XTC
MUMMER

APE

★★★½

XTC's sixth LP followed Andy Partridge's decision to quit touring after *English Settlement*'s success. A proper "studio album", therefore, *Mummer* nevertheless lacked label support for its dearth of singles and, sadly, Virgin were right: *Wonderland*'s synth-vibes tanked and *Love On A Farmboy's Wages*' acoustic art-pop peaked at No.50. The frisky *Funk Pop A Roll* might have fared better, while *Beating Of Hearts*' Eastern flavours repay attention, and *In Loving Memory Of A Name* offers charms like China Crisis'. **WW**

PENGUIN CAFE
A MATTER OF LIFE…

ERASED TAPES

★★★½

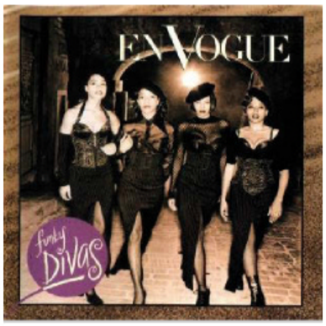
Out on vinyl for the first time, 2011's first incarnation for the rebooted Penguin Cafe Orchestra showed late bandleader Simon Jeffes' son Arthur had inherited his dad's spirit. Helped by Suede's Neil Codling and Gorillaz' Cass Browne, the collective aren't quite as offbeat as PCO's original found sound instrumentation, but they take on their pioneering ambience and bathetic harmonics perfectly: *The Fox And The Leopard* is especially beautiful. Hopefully, it presages an overdue reissue campaign for Jeffes Sr's work. **JE**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
SONG EDUCATION 3

MUSIC ON VINYL

★★½

Time for Music On Vinyl's compilations of cult classics from new TV shows to take a commercial break. While there are bangers from Wang Chung, Yello, Kool And The Gang and Bryan Ferry that match previous excellent standards, others from Greg Holden, Cecilia Krull and George Baker Selection are decent enough obscurities, but don't quite sit right with the sharply observed modern John Hughes soundtrack feel of other *Song Education* compilations. Either widen the remit or let the stock build up. **JE**



EN VOGUE
FUNKY DIVAS

RHINO

★★★★

Adding eight mixes for its 30th anniversary edition, the original queens of vocal harmonies' debut album is still a mighty powerhouse. *My Lovin'* and *Free Your Mind* paved the way for TLC and Destiny's Child, and there's plenty more in that class elsewhere. *Love Don't Love You* continued the funk, while *Giving Him Something He Can Feel* wrapped the quartet's titanic vocals around a sensual ballad and *Desire* showed that they could branch out into roots music, too. Still sounding a cut above, so much modern R&B started right here. **JE**

FASHION
FASHION MUSIC

EASY ACTION

★★½

Following the reissue of 1982's major label album *Fabrique*, the original line-up of the Birmingham early New Romantics' 1978 recordings are brought together here. Sitting somewhere between Tubeway Army and The Police, early singles *Killing Time* and *The Innocent* are an inventive if sometimes jarring mix of post-punk, electronics and reggae. Fashion occasionally sound like four different bands in search of a cohesive pattern to follow, especially on a gig from RAF Brize Norton. Messy but, when they gelled, Fashion were cutting-edge. **JE**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
GENERATION BLITZ 2: CONCRETE AND CHROME

STATE OF BASS

★★★½

The second in the series highlighting new underground artists keeping the spirit of the Blitz club alive, original scenesters B-Movie and Gary Numan collaborator Chris Payne join Sink Ya Teeth's Gemma Cullingford and Moby associate Emily Zuzik. It demonstrates the breadth of New Romanticism, encompassing cocktail bar ambience, intense melodramas and some full-on pop triumphs. Something here for all electronic tastes, and worth investing in now for "I was first" kudos when someone here breaks into the mainstream. **JE**

AL JARREAU
BREAKIN' AWAY

MUSIC ON VINYL

★★★

Featuring Toto and giving Al Jarreau a Grammy, the smooth Californian pop-soul style on his 1981 fifth album didn't quite cut through in the UK, despite *We're In This Love Together* sitting squarely next to George Benson for pioneering late-night cab driver relaxation vibes. Half the album comprises jazz covers, and guitarist Jay Graydon's production is just too polished to transmit some of the emotion in Jarreau's delivery. The sumptuous *Roof Garden* shows how hypnotic Al can be, but it's a fine line to making him feel merely snoozy. **JE**

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SUZANNE VEGA
TOWN HALL, BIRMINGHAM

11 FEBRUARY

★★★★

IN THE RUN-UP TO HER SUMMER UK FESTIVAL APPEARANCES, SUZANNE VEGA MAKES A QUICK DASH FROM NEW YORK CITY TO THE WEST MIDLANDS FOR A SELL-OUT NIGHT OF BIG APPLE-THEMED TUNES AND TALES…

One of the first major US artists to make that long trip over the pond since the pandemic threw international touring into disarray, singer-songwriter Suzanne Vega's welcomed with a full house. Although her trip is not without challenges – her planned five-week European run has been reduced to just two – she's clearly pleased to be back on stage after the best part of two years at home.

As Vega notes with a wry smile, she and long-time guitarist/sidekick Gerry Leonard are here for her "2020 tour" and "new" (now old) album *An Evening Of New York Songs And Stories*. Recorded live in her home city three years ago, it captures the New Yorker during a two-week residency at the intimate Manhattan cabaret bar Café Carlyle – a famed 90-capacity dinner venue that's previously witnessed stints from such artists as Jeff Goldblum, Eartha Kitt and (in jazz musician mode) Woody Allen. Bringing together songs from her entire back catalogue that feature New York people and places, the album forms the backbone of tonight's setlist, demonstrating Vega's strengths as an inquisitive and charming storyteller.

Supremely comfortable on stage with just an acoustic guitar and an occasional, slightly weathered top hat – which adds an air of Sally Bowles to the proceedings – her voice is as pure, clear and precise tonight as it's ever been.

Beginning with her 1985 debut single, the then (and still) jaw-dropping *Marlene On The Wall*, her set ticks all the right boxes with a mix of hit singles and album tracks, including *Caramel*, *Gypsy* and *In Liverpool* (two songs inspired by a seven-week pre-fame romance), *New York Is My Destination* (from her Carson McCullers stage project), *Pretty In Pink* soundtrack highlight *Left Of Center*, and the disturbing *Luka*.

But revealing how today is her 16th wedding anniversary, amusingly discussing her preference for black attire, recalling details of a family pet's Viking burial, and explaining New York's complex character – all while senior punk Gerry (a former Bowie collaborator) expertly weaves guitar riffs and textures under and around her exquisite voice – it's the anecdotes and air of experimentation that transform the evening, elevating Vega. If you had her pegged as 'just' an acoustic singer-songwriter, you'll be leaving later with a very different opinion.

Concluding the evening with a three-song encore that leads with a surprise stripped-back rendition of Blondie's 1979 tub-thumper *Dreaming* ("It doesn't mention New York, but I have a feeling that's where it was written," she says), it's an entertaining and thoroughly engrossing show that goes by too fast.

With Lou Reed no longer with us, is there a better observer of life in NYC than Vega? **Dave Freak**

SETLIST

1. Marlene On The Wall
2. Freeze Tag
3. Caramel
4. Gypsy
5. In Liverpool
6. The Queen And The Soldier
7. Frank And Ava
8. New York Is My Destination
9. New York Is A Woman
10. Left Of Center
11. I Never Wear White
12. Some Journey
13. Luka
14. Tom's Diner

ENCORE

15. Dreaming
16. Tombstone
17. Rosemary

ECHO & THE BUNNYMEN
O2 ACADEMY, BIRMINGHAM

26 FEBRUARY

★★★½

© Getty

IAN McCULLOCH AND WILL SERGEANT ARE BACK "CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF MAGICAL SONGS" WITH A NIGHT OF CLASSIC TRACKS AND A NEW TUNE, TOO

With the reissue of *Songs To Learn & Sing* at No.6 in the Official Vinyl Album Charts (equalling its 1985 peak), one might expect tonight's Bunnymen show to follow that 'best of' tracklisting. But not so, as band co-founders Ian McCulloch and Will Sergeant avoid the easy win of back-to-back singles, and instead open with a run of four studio album tracks.

It's a respectable, though hardly explosive start, from the iconic Liverpudlian duo who are, thankfully, quick to turn things around with 1980's well-titled *Rescue* and a shimmering singalong *Bring On The Dancing Horses* – by which time band and audience are fully in sync.

The dramatic *Over The Wall*, with its rhythm box intro, and *All My Colours (Zimbo)*, mine their often moodier side, allowing the momentum to build enough for the band to introduce new number *Brussels Is Haunted* – in which Mac suggests the Belgian capital is spooked or indebted by Waterloo, the First and Second World Wars and (hopefully not prophetically) World War III.

From there, they're sailing majestically, nodding to their influences as an extended *Villiers Terrace* pulls in The Doors' *Roadhouse Blues* and David Bowie's *The Jean Genie*, while *Nothing Lasts Forever* calls on Lou Reed's *Walk On The Wild Side*.

Shrouded in shadow for the entire night, McCulloch looms over the mic. Wearing a dark full-length coat and sunglasses, his voice sounds every bit as strong as it did back in the day. Studying him through the dry ice haze and flashing back lights, if it wasn't for the lack of bouffant-like hair, you'd swear it was twentysomething Mac up there.

Meanwhile, one of the greatest guitarists of his generation, Sergeant is the only member of the band clearly visible. Standing stage-left, he seems intent to just get on with the job in hand, shaping the material with distinctive jangling riffs (as per *The Cutter*) or more subtle psychedelic colours (like on *The Killing Moon* – "The greatest song ever written," declares McCulloch). And while the guitarist is a strong constant presence, there are times you feel he could – and perhaps should – take centre stage, and just let rip.

In the past, the Bunnymen could be accused of going through the motions, and there are points tonight where it feels like they're on autopilot. But when Sergeant, and Mac, too, push themselves such as in the forceful *Never Stop* and mountainous extended *Lips Like Sugar*, some of that old magic springs to the surface. "They're better than The Doors! They're better than The Doors!" screamed one frantic fan, loudly between encore numbers. Bold words, but no one argued.

Dave Freak

SETLIST

1. Going Up
2. Show Of Strength
3. All That Jazz
4. Flowers
5. Rescue / Broke My Neck
6. Bring On the Dancing Horses
7. Over The Wall
8. All My Colours (Zimbo)
9. Seven Seas
10. Bedbugs And Ballyhoo
11. Brussels Is Haunted
12. Villiers Terrace
13. Nothing Lasts Forever
14. Never Stop
15. Lips Like Sugar

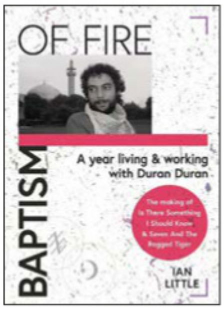
ENCORE

16. The Cutter
17. The Killing Moon
18. Ocean Rain

BAPTISM OF FIRE
IAN LITTLE
ASTRAL HORIZON PRESS

★★★

Given the calibre of some of the records that benefited from his studio expertise, with Roxy Music's *Avalon* and Duran's Duran's *Seven And The Ragged Tiger* among them, it's remarkable producer Ian Little's life could waver so extremely from the highs of his time working on those albums to the catastrophic lows he later experienced – subject to him receiving, by his own admission, "too much too soon".



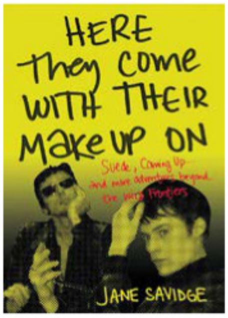
Little's story is extraordinary due to the series of chance encounters with Supertramp and Phil Manzanera that led to him becoming a producer, working with Roxy and Cliff Richard before landing a role alongside Alex Sadkin on Duran Duran's *Seven And The Ragged Tiger* – the creation of which forms the bulk of Ian's enlightening book. A wild ride taking in sessions with Le Bon and co. in Sydney, Cannes, Montserrat, New York and Sri Lanka, *Baptism Of Fire* talks at length about the recording of the album and the mania that he witnessed first-hand on the road with the fab five at their peak before the private jets and penthouses were brought to a crashing end as problems with addiction culminated in Ian sleeping in New York 'flophouses' and on the streets of London.

Ultimately inspirational, *Baptism Of Fire* is a cautionary tale taking in Little's enlightenment through self-examination and spirituality, to share the knowledge he's gleaned from even the most desperate of circumstances. **Mark Lindores**

HERE THEY COME WITH THEIR MAKE UP ON: SUEDE, COMING UP... AND MORE ADVENTURES BEYOND THE WILD FRONTIERS
JANE SAVIDGE
JAWBONE PRESS

★★★★

Three years on from the brilliant *Lunch With The Wild Frontiers*, a raucous rollercoaster ride through the excesses and chaos of the Britpop scene by Jane Savidge, comes the second book in a proposed trilogy of tell-alls from within indie's inner sanctum.



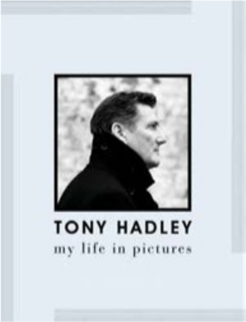
While the aforementioned *Lunch With The Wild Frontiers* was an exhilarating excursion through the cultural behemoth that was Britpop, *Here They Come With Their Make Up On* continues with amusing anecdotes aplenty, though this time they're framed by one of the landmark albums of the time, Suede's *Coming Up*. Detailing the band's journey from the brink of destruction to their critical and commercial peak, Jane's recollections of the time, along with those of the band and producer Ed Buller, formulate a concise history of the record and offer invaluable insights into its creation and legacy, putting every track under the microscope while striking the perfect balance between informative and entertaining.

Here They Come With Their Make Up On is a scintillating snapshot of a time when life really was lived in the fast lane. **ML**

MY LIFE IN PICTURES
TONY HADLEY
OMNIBUS PRESS

★★★

It's hard to believe that it's been four decades since those titans of 80s pop, Culture Club, Duran Duran and Spandau Ballet battled it out weekly to be top of the pops. To celebrate that anniversary, a wealth of commemorative releases are planned in the form of reissues, books and documentaries this year and, as Spandau have already been the subject of a documentary – the brilliant *Soul Boys Of The Western World* – and Tony has also published an autobiography (2004's *To Cut A Long Story Short*), *My Life In Pictures* is a visual presentation of his career.



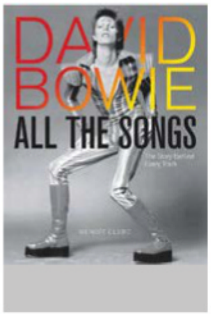
As the title suggests, this photo book which is culled from Hadley's personal archive is a chronological journey through his life accompanied by the singer's anecdotes. Undoubtedly the highlights are the passages dedicated to Spandau's heyday – from their early incarnation as Gentry, through their formative gigs as kilt-wearing kids at the Blitz club to suave chart-toppers. Behind-the-scenes shots at Band Aid and Live Aid also offer an alternative perspective on iconic moments of 80s pop culture.

Subsequently, the book covers the court case that ended the group, the reunion tour that brought them back together, plus the solo gigs after they split once more, alongside images marking Tony's stint in the West End in *Chicago*, his wedding and an appearance on reality show *I'm A Celebrity… Get Me Out Of Here!* **ML**

DAVID BOWIE: ALL THE SONGS – THE STORY BEHIND EVERY TRACK
BENOÎT CLERC
BLACK DOG & LEVENTHAL PUBLISHERS

★★★★½

In the six years since David Bowie's death, there's been no shortage of material celebrating his life, career and legacy. While most of the titles have tended to fall into one of two camps – the exhaustive biographies or the glossy, oversize photobooks, *David Bowie: All The Songs* shifts the focus solely onto the music, presenting itself as a meticulously researched encyclopedia of all of David Jones' recorded output from his pre-Bowie recordings of the 60s to his death and beyond.



All The Songs: The Story Behind Every Track fulfils the title's promise – and then some. Every song – via singles, albums, soundtracks, collaborations – is included, with each entry including the date and location of recording, the musicians used, the producer and engineer, chart positions and background, often featuring quotes from Bowie or his collaborators. Presented in chronological order, the hefty 600-page tome makes it easy for fans to delve into their favourite era, while outtakes, boxsets and live recordings wrap everything up at the book's conclusion.

The wealth of information presented is only enhanced by hundreds of portraits, live shots and studio pics – with the lack of official artwork the book's only downside. As an overview of Bowie, Clerc's tribute is the only book you're likely to need. **ML**

DIRE STRAITS RELEASE BROTHERS IN ARMS

13 MAY 1985

Dire Straits released three albums during the 80s, two of which peaked at No.1. But few talk about their chart-topping 1982 LP *Love Over Gold* now, as it's been almost completely overshadowed culturally by the blockbusting record that came after it, *Brothers In Arms*.

The LP was the band's fifth studio album and their first recorded entirely digitally. To say that *Brothers In Arms* was a phenomenon would be underselling its global impact. It spent 14 non-consecutive weeks at No.1 in the UK and nine weeks at the top of the US Billboard chart. It was the biggest-selling album of the 80s on home soil and remains the eighth best-selling LP in UK chart history. It won Best British Album at the 1986 BRITs as well as a Grammy.

And then there's *Money For Nothing*. Released as the second single off the album, it made the US No.1 and is, to this day, Dire Straits' most successful 7". Despite Mark Knopfler's lack of enthusiasm for videos, its Steve Barron-directed promo is one of the most iconic of the decade, with its then-cutting-edge CGI intercut with footage of the band in concert. The band returned to No.1 with follow-up album *On Every Street* in 1991, but *Brothers In Arms* remains their most commercial triumph. **Steve O'Brien**

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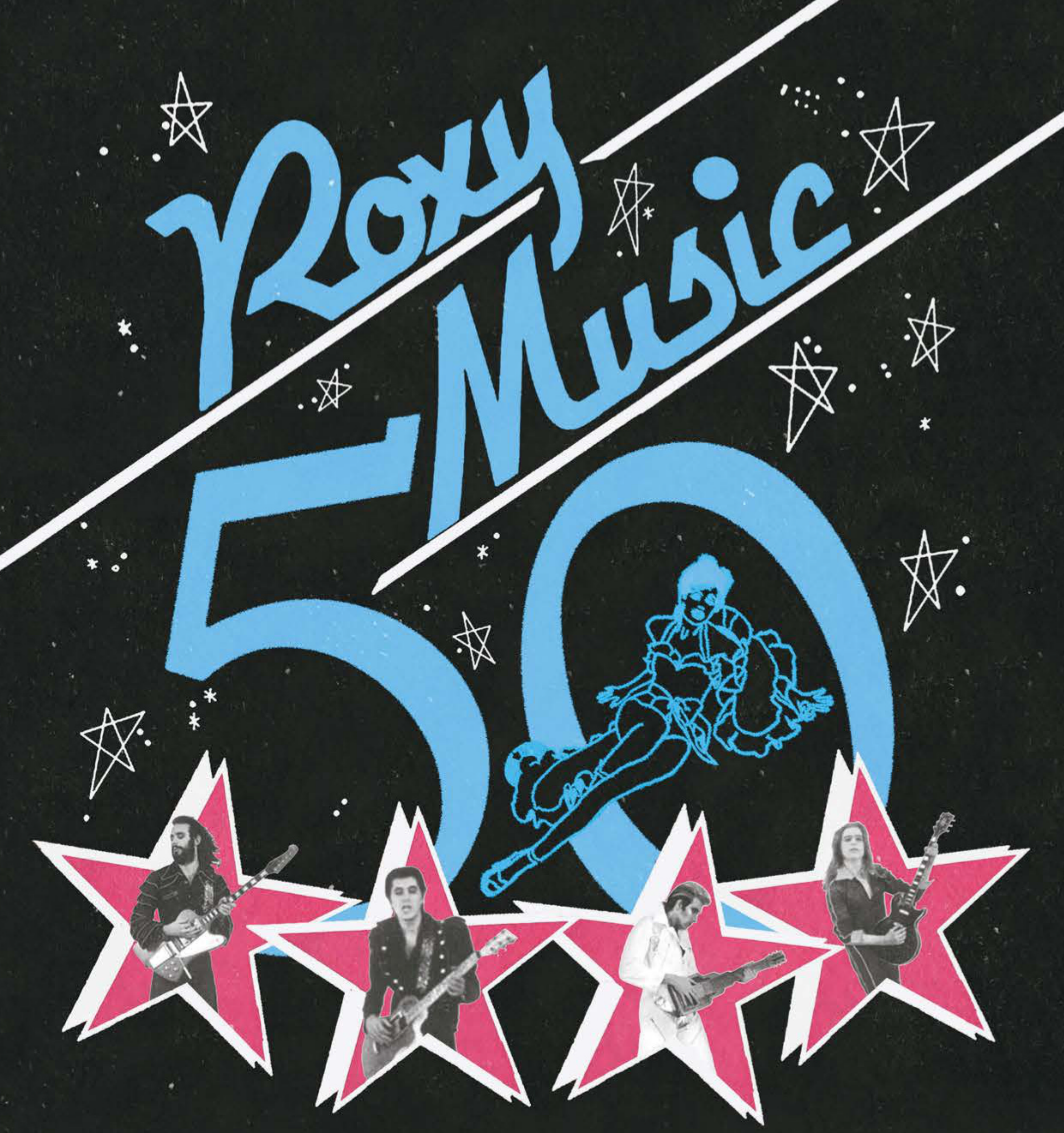

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